

# Put Up Your Feet! Vein Health and Pregnancy

by Brenda Stokes

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## Do I Have Varicose Veins?

Besides the most recognizable symptoms such as veins that look knotted or blue and spidery, [varicose veins](#) manifest themselves in a variety of other ways, including by pain. Dr. Min says the symptoms that affect the legs of pregnant women include aching, [fatigue](#), night cramps, restless legs, and [swelling](#).

"The symptoms are usually worse with prolonged standing, at the end of the day, or in warm weather," says Dr. Min. Moms-to-be may experience an even more serious condition called pelvic congestion syndrome (PCS), which involves leaking valves in the pelvic veins. Pelvic congestion syndrome usually appears in women who have had multiple pregnancies and can be noticed during pregnancy as causing pelvic pain and pain following [sexual intercourse](#).

## What Can I Do?

There is good news for pregnant women: Although varicose veins are serious, there are plenty of ways to prevent them. [Exercise](#), especially for the legs, is key to maintaining vein health during pregnancy.

Dr. Luis Navarro, MD, founder and director of [The Vein Treatment Center](#) in New York City, says leg exercises help to make a pregnant woman's "second heart" stronger. This "second heart" is a "system of muscles, veins, and valves in the calf and foot that work together as a pump ... with every step or muscle contraction." Dr. Navarro emphasizes how helpful the simple act of [walking](#) is in encouraging blood flow out of the legs and to the heart.

Three, 20-minute exercise sessions a week should do the trick, says Dr. Navarro, and you can mix it up with a variety of low-impact activities such as walking, hiking, leg lifts, or [yoga](#). You won't just be benefiting your veins, however. These activities also help to promote good cardiovascular health, [boost energy](#), and [keep weight gain minimal](#)—another factor in controlling development of varicose veins.

In addition to exercise, you can also modify your lifestyle to take the load off your veins. "Sleep and rest on [your left side](#)," advises Dr. James Chlovechok, MD, board-certified physician and founder of the Ohio Sports Medicine Institute, who explains that sleeping on the left side takes the weight off the pelvic and vena cava vessels. Likewise, keep your feet elevated and avoid standing for long periods of time. Let gravity work for you, and keep your legs lifted and parallel to your upper body when sitting.

If your veins show signs of weakening, your doctor may prescribe graduated [support hose](#), which keep pressure on your veins and help to milk the blood out of your legs. Ideally, a combination of all of the above helps to keep your veins in optimal shape, benefiting you and your baby.

Just think of varicose veins as another reason to kick up your feet and [relax](#). You deserve to take a load off; your baby and body will thank you for it.