

Varicose Veins - Not Day Case

Your Varicose Vein Operation - Some Information

These notes give a guide to your stay in hospital. They also give an idea about what it will be like afterwards. They do not cover everything. If you want to know more, please ask.

What is a Varicose Vein?

A varicose vein is a skin vein. It has swollen because of overspill of blood from veins running deep in the muscles of the legs. Varicose veins cause symptoms and the legs are better without them. There are plenty of deep veins to keep the circulation going. If left, varicose veins can bleed or clot or cause ulcers.

What does the operation consist of?

The main feeder vein to the varicose veins is tied off at the groin and below the knee, and is removed. The varicose veins are then removed through tiny cuts dotted down the leg. Sometimes another feeder vein behind the knee has to be tied off as well.

Are there any alternatives?

If you leave things as they are, there is no harm done in the short term. Over 5 or 10 years or more, you will probably notice the veins getting worse.

Injection treatment works on its own, if the veins are only seen below the knee. Injections are useful to control small veins still there after an operation.

Elastic stockings are helpful if you are not keen on an operation. They are useful to find out if your pains are due to varicose veins.

Laser treatment, ointments, and drug treatment are not helpful for your type of veins.

Camouflage make-up is helpful to cover up small flare veins.

What happens before the operation?

Welcome to the ward

You will be welcomed to the ward by the nurses or the receptionist. You will have your details checked. You will be shown to your bed and will be asked to change into your nightwear. You may have some basic tests done, such as pulse, temperature, blood pressure and urine examination.

You will be asked to hand in any medicines or drugs you may be taking, so that your drug treatment in hospital will be correct. Please tell the nurses of any allergies to drugs or dressings.

Visits by the surgical team

You will be seen first by the House Surgeon, who will interview you. If you are not clear about any part of the operation, ask for more details from the doctors or nurses. They are never too busy to do this.

You will have the varicose veins marked out on your leg(s) with a skin pencil.

You will be seen by the Surgeon who will be doing the operation. He will check that all the necessary preparations have been made.

Visits by the anaesthetic team

One or more anaesthetists who will be giving your anaesthetic will interview and examine you. They will be especially interested in chest troubles, dental treatment and any previous anaesthetics you have had. Tell them about any anaesthetic problem in your family.

Visit by the physiotherapist

The physiotherapist will show you how to keep your chest clear after the operation and how to keep moving about. You should not smoke.

Diet

You will have your usual diet until 6-12 hours before the operation when you will be asked to take nothing by mouth. This will let your stomach empty to prevent vomiting during your operation.

Timing of the operation

The timing of your operation is usually arranged the day before. The nurses will tell you when to expect to go to the operating theatre. Do not be surprised, however, if there are changes to the exact timing.

Premedication

You may be given a sedative injection or tablets about 1 hour before the operation.

Transfer to theatre

You will be taken on a trolley to the operating suite by a ward nurse and a theatre porter. You will be wearing a cotton gown. Wedding rings will be fastened with tape. Removable dentures will be left on the ward. There will be several checks on your details on the way to the anaesthetic room where your anaesthetic will begin. You will then go to sleep.

The operation is then performed.

What happens after the operation?

Coming round after the anaesthetic

Although you will be conscious a minute or two after the operation ends, you are unlikely to remember anything until you are back in your bed on the ward. Some patients feel a bit sick for up to 24 hours after operation, but this passes off. You will be given some treatment for sickness if necessary.

You may be given oxygen from a face mask for a few hours if you have had chest problems in the past.

Your leg(s) will be covered in crepe bandages from toe to groin. They are quite comfortable.

Warning after a General Anaesthetic

The drugs we give for a general anaesthetic will make you clumsy, slow and forgetful for about 24 hours. This happens even if you feel quite alright.

For 24 hours after your general anaesthetic:

- Do not make any important decisions.
- Do not drive.
- Do not use machinery at work or at home.
(e.g. do not boil a kettle).

Will it hurt?

There is some discomfort on moving rather than severe pain. You will be given injections or tablets to control this as required. Ask for more if the pain is still unpleasant.

You will be expected to get out of bed the day after operation despite the discomfort. You will not do the wound any harm, and the exercise is very helpful for you. You will be discharged from hospital at this time.

The second day after operation you should be able to spend most of your time out of bed and in reasonable comfort.

By the end of one week the wound should be virtually pain-free.

Drinking and eating

You will be able to drink within an hour or two of the operation provided you are not feeling sick.

The next day you should be able to manage small helpings of normal food.

Opening bowels

It is quite normal for the bowels not to open for a day or so after operation.

If you have not opened your bowels after 2 days and you feel uncomfortable, you can take a mild laxative such as liquid paraffin.

Passing urine

It is important that you pass urine and empty your bladder within 6-12 hours of the operation. If you find using a bed pan or a bottle difficult, the nurses will assist you to a commode or the toilet.

If you still cannot pass urine let the nurses know and steps will be taken to correct the problem.

Sleeping

You will be offered painkillers rather than sleeping pills to help you to sleep. If you cannot sleep despite the painkillers please let the nurses know.

Physiotherapy

The physiotherapist will check that you are clearing your lungs of phlegm by coughing. You can help your circulation by continuous movement of body and limbs.

POST OPERATIVE VARICOSE VEINS SURGERY INSTRUCTIONS

You have just had surgery to your varicose veins. Generally you should have minimal discomfort affecting the little incisions in your groin and your legs, however, you may require some analgesics over the next 24 - 48 hours. These have been provided by the hospital on your discharge. You have also been fitted with special compression stockings which are to promote healing and maintain your comfort during your recovery period. These stockings must be worn continuously for seven days until your clips are removed. Removal of these have been arranged either with your own General Practitioner or by returning to the hospital. Once these clips have been removed you should then wear your stockings during the daytime when you are on your feet. You can take them off when you are going to bed or when having a bath or a shower. You may have a bath or a shower three days after your operation.

Walking

There are always questions about how much walking you must do following varicose veins surgery. Mobility is important as this improves recovery time and reduces pain within the legs. Generally you will only need to walk for four fifteen minute periods in the day. You do not need to walk far but should move continuously for approximately 15 minutes during this time. This promotes the deep veins within the leg to take over the function of those veins that you have lost from the surgery. This should be continued up until your review appointment which has been arranged for approximately four weeks from the time of your surgery.

Driving

You should avoid driving for five days post-operatively. This is because your legs may feel stiff and sore for this period of time following your surgery and working controls of a car may be difficult. If you were involved in an accident your Insurance Company may question as to whether you were fit to drive and may not pay bills etc.

You may experience some discomfort in the legs for up to two weeks following your surgery. You will also notice a degree of bruising during this time, this will gradually subside as the healing process takes place. Part of the surgery you have undergone involves removing small amounts of the vein and this obviously causes a little bit of bleeding in and around the area in which the vein has been removed. The little incisions that are on your leg will heal satisfactorily within a week at the time of clip removal, however, will look somewhat red for up to six months following your surgery. As your wounds mature with time these will fade and by six months you will hardly see the little incisions that have been made.

Any of you who swim will find that this activity will be of benefit to you in your recovery and this activity can start after your clips have been removed and your wounds have healed. This activity helps disperse the bruising that may be present on your legs and also improves venous return through the deep muscle compartments.

If you have any problems during your recovery time contact your own General Practitioner initially for advise, if he feels further consultation is necessary with the hospital he will get in touch with us directly and we will see you in the ward or at out-patients on an urgent basis.

What about informing my relatives and contacts?

With your permission, the nurses and doctors will keep your relatives and contacts up to date with your progress.

How long in hospital?

Usually you will feel fit enough to leave hospital in 24 hours.

The nurses will talk to you about your home arrangements so that a proper time for you to leave hospital can be arranged.

You will be given an appointment to visit the Out Patient Department six to eight weeks after you leave hospital.

After you leave hospital

You are likely to feel very tired and need rests 2 to 3 times a day for a week or more. You will gradually improve so that by the time a month has passed you will be able to return completely to your usual level of activity.

Lifting

At first discomfort in the wound will prevent you from harming yourself by too heavy lifting. After one month you can lift whatever you like. There is no value in trying to speed the recovery of the wound by special exercises before the month is out.

Work

You should be able to return to a light job after about 1 week, and any heavy job within 4 weeks.

In the Out Patient Department

There is always some purple or yellow staining of the skin from bruising which fades away in a week or two. This is often seen in the upper thigh.

There is often some swelling around the ankle which lasts a week or two. It is controlled by using an elastic stocking as required.

There may be some lumpiness under the skin where the veins have been removed. This settles down.

The leg will may take 6 months or more after the operation to reach its best.

Complications

Complications are rare and seldom serious. If you think that all is not well, please ask the nurses or doctors.

Sometimes the paper dressings graze the skin. The marks fade away in 2 to 3 weeks.

Infection is a rare problem and settles down with antibiotics in a week or two.

Aches and twinges may be felt in the wound for up to 6 months.

Occasionally there is numbness in the skin, where a skin nerve has been damaged by one of the tiny skin cuts. This improves in up to a year, but is permanent in a few patients.

Treating varicose veins is something of a running battle. Sometimes new veins appear, or veins which were not noticed before operation become more obvious afterwards. Make sure that all the veins that trouble you are marked with the skin pencil. Ask the Surgeon about any problem vein.

General advice

The operation should not be underestimated, but practically all patients are back to their normal duties within 1 month.

If you have any problems or queries, please ask the nurses or doctors.

Any Questions?

If you have any questions, jot them down here and ask the doctors or nurses for answers.

If your stay has been pleasant or you have any suggestions to improve the experience in Hospital please write to me at the address below. If any member of staff has stood out in your care again write to me. Positive feedback is always appreciated. Use the form overleaf to help with this.

Any complaints?

If you have any complaints, please contact the doctors or nurses straight away. If this does not solve the problem, please write to me at Surgical Unit, Causeway Hospital, 4 Newbridge Road, Coleraine. BT52 1HS.

Mr M G Brown, MD FRCS
Consultant Surgeon & Vascular Surgeon.

Have you any comments?

We welcome your comments and suggestions covering your illness, your treatment in hospital, and your recovery. Please write below any points you would like to make. If you prefer, you need not give your name.

Full name:

Hospital:

Ward:

Date of stay in hospital:

Operation:

Out patients department:

Your admission arrangements:

Your welcome on the ward:

Nursing staff:

General ward atmosphere:

Medical staff:

Ward orderlies:

Portering staff:

X-ray staff:

ECG staff:

Did you know who was who?:

Bedding:

Food and drink:

Privacy:

Locker space:

Toilets:

Bathrooms:

Other patients:

Noise:

Information:

Telephone/TV/radio/newspapers:

Timing of operation:

Preparations for your operation:

Going into the theatre:

In the operating theatre:

In the recovery room:

Coming back from theatre:

Intensive Care ward:

Recovery on the ward:

Pain control:

Sleeping:

Wound dressings:

Stitches, clips:

Progress reports:

Visiting hours:

Rest room:

Tablets, medicines, injections:

Going-home arrangements:

Out-patient follow up:

Anything else?