







6 Natural Approaches to Varicose Veins

Dr. Michael Murray | April 18, 2013 | 11:30 am | 81 comments

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As swimsuit season approaches, many adults dread exposing their legs because of ugly varicose veins. Varicose veins affect nearly 50 percent of middle-aged adults. The subcutaneous veins of the legs are the veins most commonly affected, owing to the gravitational pressure standing exerts on them. When we stand for extended periods, the pressure in the vein can increase by up to 10 times.

Women are affected about four times as frequently as men, and pregnancy increases the occurrence of varicose veins. Obese individuals have a much greater risk, and the risk for all people rises with age due to loss of tissue tone, loss of muscle mass, and weakening of the walls of the veins.

In general, varicose veins pose little harm if the involved vein is near the surface. A more serious form of varicose vein involves obstruction and valve defects of the deeper veins of the leg. This type of varicose vein can lead to problems such as thrombo-phlebitis, pulmonary embolism, myocardial infarction, and stroke. Diagnosis is made by clinical signs and symptoms, and diagnostic ultrasound.

How to Avoid Aggressive Treatment

Conservative therapy, described below, should be employed as early as possible for patients with varicose veins. It may halt the progression and prevent the need for more aggressive therapy—namely, surgery.

High-fiber diet, and lots of water. A high-fiber diet rich in vegetables, fruits, legumes, and grains promotes peristalsis, a series of muscle contractions that occur in your digestive tract. If you are constipated because of a low-fiber diet, it raises pressure in the abdomen, obstructing the healthy flow of blood up the legs, weakening the vein walls over time and causing varicose veins and hemorrhoids.

Flavonoids. Hawthorn berries, cherries, blueberries, blackcurrants, and blackberries appear to be beneficial in the prevention and treatment of varicose veins. These berries are very rich sources of proanthocyanidins and anthocyanidins, flavonoids that are noted for their ability to improve the function and integrity of the vascular system. Other rich sources of flavonoids include buckwheat (*Fagopyrum esculenhtum*) and extracts of grape seed or pine bark. The most useful single flavonoid for varicose veins may be micronized diosmin, which has shown considerable benefits in promoting the healing of varicose veins, venous ulcers, and hemorrhoids.

Horse chestnut. The seeds of the horse chestnut tree (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) have been valued for centuries for their ability to improve hemorrhoids and varicose veins. This historical use ultimately has led to the development of topical and oral preparations with confirmed clinical benefits for these conditions.

Gotu kola. When given orally, an extract of gotu kola (*Centella asiatica*) containing 70 percent triterpenic acids (asiatic acid, madecassic acid, and asiatoside) has demonstrated impressive clinical results in the treatment of cellulite, venous insufficiency of the lower limbs, and varicose veins.

Butcher's broom. The rhizome from the shrub butcher's broom (*Ruscus aculeatus*) has a long history of use, especially in Europe, in treating venous disorders such as hemorrhoids and varicose veins. The active ingredients in butcher's broom are ruscogenins. These compounds have demonstrated a wide range of pharmacological actions, including anti-inflammatory and tonic effects on blood vessels.

Bromelain and Other Fibrinolytic Compounds. Individuals with varicose veins have a decreased ability to break down fibrin, a fibrous, nonglobular protein involved in the clotting of blood. This is important because fibrin is deposited in the tissue next the varicose veins. The skin then becomes "lumpy" owing to the presence of the fibrin and fat. Herbs, foods, and spices that increase the fibrinolytic activity of the blood are therefore indicated. These include: cayenne, ginger, pineapple, and natto, a traditional Japanese food prepared from fermented soybeans.