

# Varicose Veins

“Imperfections” You Don’t Have To Live With.

By Antonios Gasparis, M.D., board-certified vascular surgeon

**W**e all know of some women and even some men who tend to avoid wearing shorts during the summer because of unsightly varicose or spider veins. These perceived leg “imperfections” make some individuals self-conscious, often even lowering their self-esteem. Regardless of how severe the problem may be, there are minimally-invasive treatment options available to eliminate these imperfections.

Venous disease is very common, affecting about 80 million Americans. Varicose veins are present in 1 out of 2 people. They appear in both men and women, but are much more common in women. Varicose veins occur secondary to abnormal vein walls or abnormal valves, which act as one-way valves, preventing blood from pooling backwards. When these one-way valves malfunction, blood then may flow backwards, causing the veins to dilate (swell/enlarge) and become varicose. This is called venous reflux or venous insufficiency. Venous insufficiency often begins in the great or small saphenous veins. These veins are usually not visible and run along the front and back of the leg. When the valves in these veins malfunction, the branches enlarge and prominent varicose veins develop.

For some, varicose veins are a cosmetic issue. For many, however, these imperfections result in significant symptoms which affect their lifestyle. Some common symptoms of varicose veins include aching lower leg pain, a rash on the legs, burning and itching of the skin on the legs. People may also complain of easily tired legs, with swelling, heaviness or numbness in the legs. Prolonged standing often results in worsening of their symptoms. Elevation of the legs and use of compression stockings may often lead to relief of these symptoms. The most advanced form of venous disease includes darkening of the skin and skin ulceration (wound).

Venous insufficiency can be easily diagnosed with a simple non-invasive test called venous ultrasound (duplex). This is done to determine if the valves in your veins are functioning normally. Following your ultrasound, your doctor may have you see a vein specialist for evaluation. The first line of therapy includes conservative options such as leg elevation, compression stockings, weight loss and exercise. The second line of therapy is surgical treatment of the venous insufficiency which traditionally involves two steps. The first step is to remove the saphenous vein, which is the source of the problem. The second step is to remove the



branches of the saphenous vein, which are the varicose veins.

Achieving each one of these steps can be obtained by many options. Traditional stripping of the saphenous vein from the groin to the ankle involves surgical time in the operating room. This procedure is usually performed under general anesthesia and is associated with significant pain and recovery time.

Advancements in technology allow treatment of the saphenous vein without surgical time in the operating room. There are currently two methods available, laser therapy (EVLT®) and radiofrequency ablation (RFA or Closure®), used to eliminate reflux or backflow. Both of these technologies are available to the patients of the Stony Brook Vein Center.

Both treatments involve a minimally invasive procedure which is performed in the office. The procedure is done with local anesthesia and takes about 30-60 minutes. Following the procedure, the leg is wrapped with a compression bandage and the patient walks out of the office with little to no pain. There is very minimal down time, with most patients able to return to normal activity in 1-2 days.

Following treatment of the saphenous vein, the next step is to treat the varicose veins. Some are removed using a technique called mini-phlebectomy in the office while other veins that are too small (spider veins), are treated with sclerotherapy. Sclerotherapy involves an injection of a chemical solution into the vein that causes the vein walls to swell, stick together, and seal shut. Most patients can expect a 50-90% improvement after a course of treatment. Successful completion of the recommended number of sessions will help to achieve optimal results.

When it comes to treatment options for varicose veins, there is no single cure, but rather combinations of modalities to obtain the best results. The physicians at the Stony Brook Vein Center provide comprehensive venous evaluations and offer all currently available treatment modalities tailored to each individual personal need.

To have a free consultation, with one of our board-certified vascular surgeons, call (631) 444-VEIN (8346). •

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Each patient is unique and treatment should be tailored based on the underlying problem.

