Varicose Veins

What are varicose veins?
Varicose veins are veins that become large, twisted, and swollen. They are common on the back of the calves, knees, and thighs.

What causes varicose veins?
Varicose veins are caused by valves in the veins that do not work properly. This causes blood to collect and increase pressure in the veins of the legs. The increased pressure causes the veins to stretch, get larger, swell, and twist.

What increases my risk of varicose veins?
- Pregnancy
- Family history of varicose veins
- Being overweight
- Age, especially 50 years or older
- Sitting or standing for long periods of time
- Wearing tight clothing
- Smoking

What are the signs and symptoms of varicose veins?
Symptoms may be worse after patient stands or sits for long periods of time.
- Blue, purple, or bulging veins in the legs
- Pain, swelling, or muscle cramps in the legs
- Feeling of heaviness in the legs

How are varicose veins diagnosed?
First step involves thorough examination of patient's leg and ask about medical history. Patient may need a test called a Doppler ultrasound or duplex scan. This test uses sound waves to show pictures of the veins on a monitor. It is done to show how blood flows through the veins and to check for blood clots.

How are varicose veins treated?
Treatment of varicose veins aims to decrease symptoms, improve appearance, and prevent further problems. It will depend on which veins are affected and how severe condition the patients is, following options are available:
- Prescription pain medicine may be given.
- Procedures may be done to remove the varicose veins. Doctor may inject a solution or use a laser to close the varicose veins. Surgery to remove long veins may also be done.
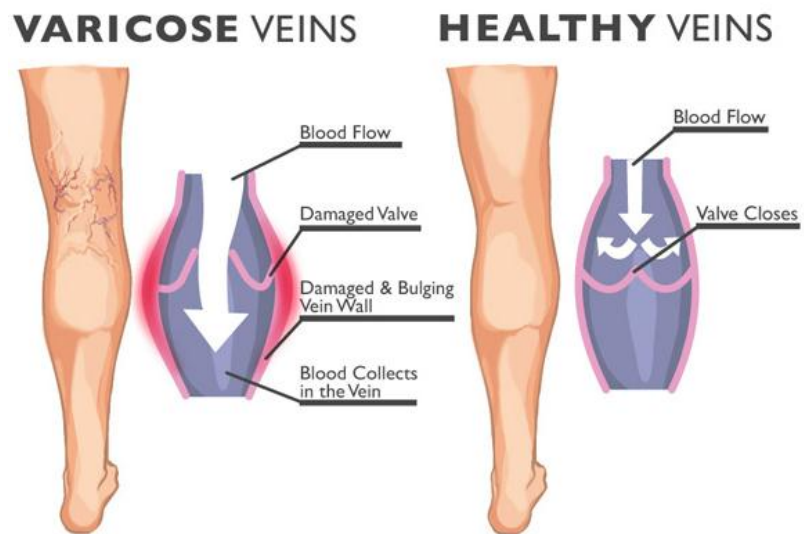
Complications of varicose veins:
- Bleeding
- Blood clots
- Chronic venous insufficiency
- Varicose eczema (skin becomes inflamed & irritated)

What can be done to manage symptoms?
- Wear pressure stockings, they improve blood flow and help prevent clots.
- Elevate legs above the level of the heart for 15 to 30 minutes several times a day. This will help blood to flow back to the heart.
- Avoid sitting or standing for long periods of time, this can cause the blood to collect in the legs and make the symptoms worse. Walk around for a few minutes every hour to get blood moving in legs.
- Avoid wearing tight clothing and shoes. Avoid wearing high-heeled shoes. Do not wear clothes that are tight around the waist.
- Get plenty of exercise, exercise can decrease your blood pressure and improve health. Bend or rotate your ankles several times every hour, this will help blood to flow back to the heart.
- Maintain a healthy weight, being overweight can make varicose veins worse
- Avoid alcohol as it dilates blood vessels making varicose veins condition worse.
- Quit smoking as it doesn't keep your blood circulation healthy.

When should patient contact healthcare provider?
- Symptoms get worse.
- Patient suffers an injury that has caused varicose veins to bleed underneath skin.
- Appearance of a rash on leg.
- Symptoms keep you from doing your daily activities.

When should patient seek immediate care?
Immediate care is necessary in the following situations:
- a wound that does not heal or is infected
- an injury that has broken your skin and caused your varicose veins to bleed
- leg is swollen and hard
- pain in your leg that does not go away or gets worse
- legs or feet are turning blue or black
- leg feels warm, tender, and painful, it may look swollen and red

Reference:
Micromedex's Care Notes System Online 2.0