

Information for Patients

Surgery to remove varicose veins, should only be carried out when specific criteria are met. This is because the medical evidence tells us that there are alternative treatments which can be just as effective and as with all surgical procedures there are risks attached.

About the condition

Varicose veins are swollen and enlarged veins that can occur in your legs. They develop when the small valves inside the veins stop working properly. In a healthy vein, blood is prevented from flowing down the leg by a series of tiny valves that open and close to let blood through. If the valves weaken or are damaged, the blood can flow backwards and collect in the vein, eventually causing it to become swollen and enlarged (varicose).

It is important that if you have symptomatic veins or complications that your doctor refers you to a vascular specialist. It is important that your vascular specialist then explains the treatment options to you, including the benefits and risks of intervention and what will happen if you do nothing.

What are the **BENEFITS** of the intervention?

The first treatment option is endothermal ablation, which uses radio waves or laser to burn and close the affected veins from inside the vein. The second, known as ultrasound guided foam sclerotherapy, involves injecting a foam medication into the affected vein to scar and block the vein. Open surgery (also known as 'stripping') remains an option for some patients, but should only be carried out if other alternatives are not suitable.

What are the **RISKS** of the intervention?

The risks of intervention are very low but include deep vein thrombosis (DVT), nerve damage, infection and pain. The procedure is usually carried out under local anaesthetic. Most people can return to normal activities including work within 24 hours.

What are the **ALTERNATIVES**?

Compression stockings can be helpful but are only recommended if you are not suitable for intervention. Regular exercise, avoiding standing for long periods of time or elevating the affected area when resting may relieve some symptoms.

What if you do **NOTHING**?

Varicose veins don't always need treatment, however interventions should be performed if the veins are causing you pain, discomfort, swelling or are leading to other complications such as bleeding, skin discolouration, thrombosis or ulceration.

You can find out more about the [NHS Evidence Based Interventions](#) programme online.