Information for patients

Conservative treatment of varicose veins

Northern General Hospital
You have been diagnosed as having Varicose Veins and your specialist has decided conservative treatment is the best treatment for you. This leaflet explains more about the conservative treatment of Varicose Veins and answers some of the most frequently asked questions. If, after reading it, you have any more questions or concerns, you should write them down and discuss them at your next appointment.

Where will my hospital appointments take place?

Your appointments will usually be at the Sheffield Vascular Institute at the **Northern General Hospital**. We also run local outpatient clinics at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Rotherham and Barnsley District General.

The Sheffield Vascular Institute is one of the largest vascular centres in Europe. We specialise in the treatment of all circulatory conditions affecting the arteries, veins and lymphatics. If you wish to find out more about the Sheffield Vascular Institute then look under the Guide to Services of the Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust website (http://www.sth.nhs.uk)

Why are varicose veins treated conservatively?

Varicose veins are usually harmless and rarely cause serious medical problems. Following the advice below may be enough to alleviate your symptoms. Although varicose veins can get worse over the years, this happens very slowly. Worry that they might get worse is not a good reason for treatment if the veins are not causing symptoms. It is best to avoid other treatment if you can avoid it.

**Work:** Jobs that involve prolonged standing make varicose veins worse. If you have to stand for long periods, then wear support stockings. Going for short walks during breaks in the working day will also help.
Pregnancy: Varicose veins often first appear in pregnancy and further pregnancies tend to make them worse. Make sure that you wear support stockings, especially in the later stages of pregnancy, and after delivery.

Drugs: Some people find that soothing creams containing peppermint, menthol or horse chestnut provide relief from itching and aching. Quinine tablets can help relieve night cramps.

Support stockings or tights: Support hosiery helps to counteract the high pressure in the veins and relieve symptoms, but they must be well fitted and comfortable. Support stockings are available either on prescription at the hospital orthotic department, or on sale at chemists and surgical appliance stores. Below knee graduated compression stockings are usually adequate, but full length ones are available. For men, below knee support stockings are made in a variety of colours, which look like ordinary long socks. Open toe versions are also available which can be worn under socks or tights.

Support hosiery is graded as Class 1 (often enough to control aching from varicose veins), Class 2 (medium strength, and most often prescribed by specialists), and Class 3 (very supportive, and generally for people with serious symptoms such as ulcers).

Are there other treatment options available?

You and your specialist have decided that conservative measures for your veins are the best treatment for you. Other treatments for varicose veins include surgical removal, laser treatment or injections into the veins. More detailed booklets are available on these treatments.
**How can I help myself?**

**Weight:** Being overweight increases symptoms from varicose veins and may make the veins get worse more quickly. When you attend the clinic, we will tell you your ideal body weight. If you are heavier than this, then you are advised to lose weight, aiming at your ideal figure.

**Exercise:** Regular exercise of any kind is a good idea. Walking is excellent, but any leg exercise is beneficial (for example, jogging, cycling, swimming, etc.).

**Elevation:** Putting your feet up helps to relieve symptoms, especially at the end of the day. You should aim to get your feet at least the same level as your hips, for example, up on the end of a sofa or another chair.

**Smoking:** Smoking causes damage to the arteries in your legs and it is better for your overall health if you stop smoking.

**What if I need more information?**

More details on Varicose Veins can be found at:  
[www.circulationfoundation.org.uk](http://www.circulationfoundation.org.uk)