

Interventional Radiology
State of the Art Treatment for Varicose Veins
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Venous insufficiency is a common disorder affecting 1 out of 5 adults. Approximately 25% of all women and 15% of all men have venous insufficiency. The most common symptom of lower extremity venous insufficiency is a varicose vein. Other leg complaints associated with varicose veins include aching pain, night cramps, fatigue, heaviness, or restlessness.

Lower extremity varicose veins are the result of failure of the valves inside the veins. Normally these valves keep blood flowing out of the legs back to the heart. When these valves fail, the veins hold too much blood and dilate. Causes include pregnancy, obesity, age, trauma, and prolonged standing. Other symptoms of venous insufficiency are skin discoloration, leg swelling, and skin breakdown. Left untreated 50% of varicose vein patients' symptoms will continue to worsen.

Varicose veins are often painful and unattractive. Although many people seek medical treatment for varicose veins because they

find them unsightly, most people with varicose veins do experience symptoms. The only way to treat these dilated veins is to stop the superficial venous blood flow from the leg (the greater saphenous vein). The traditional treatment has been to surgically remove the vein by “stripping”. This is a procedure done under general anesthesia, with surgical incisions at the knee and groin. The recovery is lengthy and often painful.

A new treatment has grown from the need for a quicker, easier way to treat varicose veins. **That treatment is EVLT (Endovascular laser therapy)**. This short outpatient procedure uses a laser to permanently block the outflow vein instead of surgically removing it. The procedure takes approximately 45 minutes and patients are up and walking as soon as the procedure is over. Also, the procedure uses the skills of the interventional radiologist. After using a local anesthetic the interventional radiologist uses ultrasound guidance to deliver the small laser fiber through a tiny incision. The laser delivers energy to the tissues immediately blocking the abnormal vein.

Patients report great results after the procedure. Medical lasers are extremely safe and very few complications have been reported. Some patients experience tightness in the treated extremity for a few

days after the procedure. Some patients see results right away. In a recent study, overall treatment satisfaction was determined by asking subjects if they would recommend the procedure to a friend with similar leg vein problems, and 422 of 423 subjects (99.8%) indicated they would recommend the procedure. (1)

1 Endovenous Laser Treatment of Saphenous Vein Reflux: Long-Term Results

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