Bleeding Varicose Veins

Varicose veins are veins that are larger than normal. They bulge out and often look twisted. Most of the time, they develop in the legs. They are usually dark blue or purple. The skin close to the veins might also be an unusual color. Sometimes these veins bleed. Raising the foot above the heart and applying pressure usually stops the bleeding. Surgery may be needed to keep the bleeding from happening again.

CAUSES

Varicose veins are a sign that blood is not flowing to the heart as it should. Instead, it has pooled in the veins because the small valves in the veins no longer prevent back flow of blood. This pooling causes the veins to get bigger. Bleeding is a problem that can result. Factors that can lead to bleeding include:

- Thin skin. The skin that covers the veins is stretched as the veins enlarge.
- Weak veins. The walls of varicose veins are also thin. That is part of the reason why blood is not flowing normally to the heart. Also, pressure in the veins is high. That occurs because the blood is not flowing freely back up to the heart. Why the walls become thin in the first place is not known.
- Injury. Even a small injury to a varicose vein can cause bleeding. Bleeding might result from:
  - A scrape from bumping a piece of furniture.
  - A nick from shaving.
- Open wounds. A sore that does not heal sometimes develops near varicose veins. This makes bleeding more likely.

SYMPTOMS

- If bleeding is on the outside surface of the skin, blood can be seen.
- Sometimes, the bleeding stays under the skin. Then the blue or purple area will spread beyond the vein. It may be visible underneath the skin.

DIAGNOSIS

To decide if you have a bleeding varicose vein, your healthcare provider will probably:

- Ask about symptoms you have noticed. This will include when you first saw bleeding.
- Ask about how long you have had varicose veins. Ask if they cause you problems.
- Ask about your health overall.
- Ask about possible causes, like recent cuts, or if the area near the varicose veins was bumped or injured.
- Examine the skin or leg that concerns you. Your caregiver will probably feel the veins.
- Order imaging tests. These create detailed pictures of the veins. Ultrasound, for instance, uses sound waves to make pictures.

TREATMENT

The first goal of treating bleeding varicose veins is to stop the bleeding. Then the aim is to keep any bleeding from happening again. Treatment will depend on the cause of the bleeding and how bad it is. Be sure to ask your healthcare provider about what would be best for you. Options include:

- Pressure and raising the leg (*elevation*). Lie down with your leg raised. Your foot should be above your heart. Apply pressure to the spot that is bleeding. The bleeding should stop in a short time.
- An elastic sock that keeps pressure on the area (*compression stocking*). An elastic bandage may do the same thing.
- A cream or gel that fights infection (*antibiotic ointment*). This may be suggested if you have small sores that are not healing.
- Surgery. Sometimes the bleeding varicose veins need to be removed or closed off. The legs have many veins. Removing one or more will not harm your blood flow. Options for surgery include:
  - Traditional surgery. Cuts (*incisions*) are made in the skin. The veins are then taken out.
  - A procedure that uses heat to close varicose veins (*ablation*). Several methods can be used.

- Medication is shot (*injected*) into the vein. This medication hardens the walls of the vein. This closes off the vein. This treatment is called sclerotherapy. Afterwards, you may need to wear clothing or bandages that apply pressure.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Apply any creams that your healthcare provider prescribed. Follow the directions carefully.
- Wear compression stockings or any special wraps that were prescribed. Make sure you know:
  - If you should wear them every day.
  - How long you should wear them.
- If veins were removed or closed, a dressing (gauze and a bandage) will probably cover the area. Make sure you know:
  - How often the bandage should be changed.
  - Whether the area can get wet.
  - When you can leave the skin uncovered.
- Check your skin every day. Look for new sores. Also look for signs of bleeding.
- To prevent future bleeding:
  - Use extra care in situations where you could cut your legs. Shaving, for example, or working outside in the garden.
  - Try to keep your legs up as much as possible. Lie down when you can. Use a foot stool when sitting.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have any questions about how to wear special stockings or bandages.
- Your veins continue to bleed.
- Sores develop near your varicose veins.
- You have a sore that does not heal or gets bigger.
- Pain increases in your leg.
- The area around a varicose vein becomes warm, red or tender to touch.
- You notice a yellowish fluid that smells bad coming from a spot where there was bleeding.
- You develop a fever of more than 100.5°F (38.1°C).

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop a fever of more than 102°F (38.9°C).

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