

LASER LIGHT THERAPY

“It gave me my life back.”

“It gave me my life back,” said Ben a patient of Dr. Richards.

Varicose veins are not pretty and they can hurt. Formerly, the cure for most patients was an uncomfortable procedure called vein stripping, a process often worse than the disease itself. Vein stripping ranked up there next to a root canal. However, in recent years advancements in medical technology have developed methods to treat varicose veins as an outpatient procedure with minimal pain, quick recovery and less scarring. Women and men who have suffered for years can now be treated.

What are varicose veins? Varicose comes from the Latin word varix, which means twisted. Veins in the legs can thicken, twist or dilate. It can



occur anywhere from the ankles to the groin. As blood pools in these veins they, turn dark purple or blue.

In the U.S., 19-25% of men and 36% of women have varicose veins. The condition tends to be inherited and can become more prominent with age if not treated. Generally, a defective or poorly functioning valve is the cause of the varicosities. Superficial veins and their branches are typically affected.

Common signs and symptoms of varicosities may include: an achy or heavy feeling in the legs, itching, severe pain when standing or leg cramping at night. Thrombophlebitis, an inflammation of the vein can cause areas of tenderness, pain, redness and swelling. General recommendations include: a high fiber diet, weight loss, decrease in alcohol consumption, never crossing your legs when sitting, avoiding prolonged periods of standing or sitting and walking more to improve circulation.

Advancements in non-surgical treatments are aimed at improving blood flow through the valves and decreasing the backflow resistance. The two new treatments of varicose veins are endovascular radiofrequency ablation and laser therapy. Radiofrequency ablation delivers high frequency radiowaves through a catheter to the walls of a major vein in the leg. Directly heating the wall of the vein causes that section to collapse. As the catheter is slowly withdrawn the whole vein is occluded. Similarly a laser fiber can be inserted in the vein and a laser used to collapse down a long segment. Drs. Tim Richards and Dan Hoheim at Community Surgical Associates are the leaders in Western Montana on the use of VenaCure, a laser vein treatment. In the past two years they have treated close to 500 patients, on an outpatient basis, in their office.

“Laser treatment for varicose veins has really benefited patients’ varicose veins,” says Dr. Richards. “There is less pain, it’s effective and there is a fast recovery time. Some of our patients will return to work the next day.” He went on to say, “Vein stripping is painful, it requires general anesthesia and has to be performed in the operating room.

Patients could be off work for weeks.”

I was given permission to observe a laser treatment being performed. The patient, Ben, until the past 4 years loved to hunt and fly fish. “My legs began hurting and I just stopped doing things,” he said while conversing with me during the procedure. “I was very pleased with how my other leg turned out after the laser treatment, and that was my bad leg,” he joked. “Dr. Richards and Dr. Hoheim are the best. This surgery has made such a difference in my life. I didn’t realize how much these veins had slowed me down. I’m only 42 years old; there are things I still want to do.”

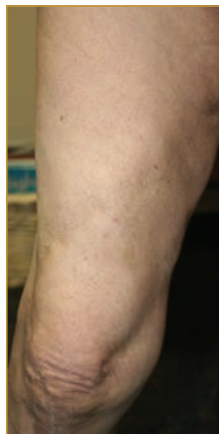
“Treating varicose veins is not just cosmetic,” said Dr. Richards. “It can really make a difference in some people’s lives. This new laser treatment is very fast and well tolerated. In the old days with vein stripping, we always did the worse leg first because the patient wouldn’t come back to treat the other leg. We don’t have that problem anymore. We do free vein screening for patients that aren’t sure what to do.”

As Ben left the room, his last words to me were: “It’s a shame that more people don’t get their legs fixed.”

“Make sure people know about this. It’s a shame that more people don’t get their legs fixed.”

BEFORE

AFTER



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