

# Varicose Veins

## Questions & Answers About Varicose Veins

### What are varicose veins?

Varicose veins are abnormal veins that can occur in the legs. They can be small, thin purple-colored lines (called "[spider veins](#)") that lie just below the skin surface, or they can appear as thick, bulging or knotty veins. While many people think that varicose veins are simply a cosmetic issue, there is in fact often an underlying medical problem that causes varicose veins. This medical condition is called [venous reflux disease](#).

### Varicose veins can be a sign of a medical problem?

Yes. In healthy legs, your veins contain valves that normally allow blood to move in one direction, returning blood from your legs to your heart. When the valves in your leg veins cannot close properly, the blood pools in your leg veins which causes pressure and swelling. This pooling and pressure caused by diseased vein valves is a symptom of [venous reflux disease](#).

### How common are varicose veins and venous reflux disease?

Varicose veins are a common medical condition. It is estimated that 25 million people in the United States and 40 million people in Europe suffer from painful symptoms of varicose veins caused by [venous reflux disease](#).

## What are the symptoms of varicose veins?

People with varicose veins frequently say that their legs feel "full" or tired, or are heavy, itch or throb. Varicose veins can be painful. Sometimes people with varicose veins experience swelling of the legs or ankles. Left untreated, the signs and symptoms of varicose veins can also include skin changes such as discoloration, inflammation and even ulcers.

It is important to know that [venous reflux](#) is a progressive disease. That means that if left untreated, it can progress to more serious symptoms. Varicose veins caused by [venous reflux disease](#) will not go away by themselves.

## Am I at risk for developing varicose veins?

Varicose veins are often common within families. Also, people who stand for long periods of time or perform heavy lifting, women who have had multiple pregnancies, and those who are obese may be more at risk for varicose veins. Click here for a brief [self-assessment](#) that may help you discuss this with a doctor.

## How do these doctors treat varicose veins?

Each person's vein problem is unique. The types and severity and locations of varicose veins on your legs will be unique. But a [vein specialist](#) is trained to provide a treatment plan that is specific for you. The good news is that today, varicose vein patients have a choice. Patients no longer have to undergo painful "[vein stripping](#)" in the hospital. Varicose veins can now be treated right in your doctor's office. The procedure is fast, is performed while you're awake and typically allows you to return to normal activities the next day.