

The **Belfast Vein Clinic**

Modern Vein Care

www.thebelfastveinclinic.com

Varicose Veins

How common are Varicose Veins?

Varicose veins are a very common problem. Approximately 30 per cent of women and 15% of men have varicose veins. The biggest single cause is hereditary. Veins run in families and most patients will have affected family members. Although varicose veins are commoner in older people, they present their greatest problems in young active individuals where they may interfere with work and leisure pursuits.

Varicose veins are more common in women who have had children, and the more pregnancies women have, the more likely they are to develop varicose veins. Varicose veins that develop in pregnancy are said to result partly from the pressure of the womb on the veins, but the evidence for this is poor, and relaxation of the vein walls by hormones may be more important. It is often thought that varicose veins are more common in people who stand still for prolonged periods. This has never been proven.

Why do veins become varicose?

Doctors are not certain what causes varicose veins. We know that there is failure of the valves in veins that allow one-way blood flow back to the heart from the legs. These poorly functioning valves allow blood to pool and cause lengthening and swelling of the veins themselves leading to the twisted rope-like appearance of varicose veins.

What are the symptoms of varicose veins?

Many people with varicose veins never have symptoms of any kind from them. When symptoms do occur, they are generally a nuisance, rather than medically serious. Only very small proportions of people with varicose veins ever develop ulcers and there are almost always warning signs, with darkening or eczema of the skin at the ankle.

Cosmetic appearances

This is by far the most common problem. Many patients with varicose veins will not wear skirts or shorts. In our clinic we have seen mothers who have never taken their children swimming or got undressed in front of their husbands.

Aching and discomfort

Aching and heaviness of the legs are common complaints, particularly after standing up for a long time. Some people with varicose veins get itching and swollen ankles. Occasionally patients may experience restless legs. All symptoms caused by varicose veins tend to be worse at the end of the day, although we have had a few patients with night cramps.

Rare complications of varicose veins can include bleeding, phlebitis (painful inflamed veins), and superficial venous thrombosis (superficial vein clot).

Ulcers and skin changes

Abnormally high pressure in the leg veins can cause damage to the skin, and eventually lead to ulcers. The earliest sign is a patch of eczema or skin discolouration near the ankle. This then becomes warmer than the other side and the skin gradually tightens. Following a minor injury (frequently forgotten by the patient) a small ulcer develops which then enlarges and refuses to heal quickly. Only a small minority of the patients with varicose veins will develop ulcers.

Modern Vein Treatments

Modern treatment for varicose veins is often under local anaesthetic and can be conducted in an outpatient setting with walk-in-walk-out and swift return to normal activities. Treatments are sometimes combined to give the best possible results and include: Injection Sclerotherapy; Ultrasound-Guided Foam Sclerotherapy; VNUS Closure Radiofrequency Ablation; Conventional Surgery. The most suitable treatment for you can be determined on discussion with a Consultant Vascular Surgeon at The Belfast Vein Clinic.

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Contact Us

To determine if this is the correct treatment option for you contact us to arrange an assessment by a specialist Consultant Vascular Surgeon at The Belfast Vein Clinic expert in Modern Vein Care.