



Vein  
Healthcare  
Center

# Women and Vein Treatments

## Looking Better, Feeling Better



[www.veinhealthcare.com](http://www.veinhealthcare.com)



# A note from Dr. Cindy Asbjornsen

## A NOTE FROM DR. CINDY ASBJORNSEN

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Hello, and thank you for reading *Women and Vein Treatments*. For years doctors have told their patients that varicose veins were “nothing to worry about,” or “just part of getting old.” Women, in particular, have believed that it

was vain to want to rid their legs of unsightly veins.

Now here are the facts. More than 80 million Americans suffer from some form of vein disease. It is chronic and progressive and, if left untreated, can lead to worsening symptoms and complications. For many people, their problem veins have a significant impact on their self-esteem and overall wellbeing.

Treating varicose veins is not about vanity. It’s about your health and quality of life.

As a board certified phlebologist (vein specialist) I am committed to educating people about vein health. I hope that this article will support you in making good, informed decisions, as well as to help you ask the right questions.

Sincerely,



Dr. Cindy Asbjornsen

DO, FACPh

*Vein Healthcare Center*

# Do only women get varicose veins?

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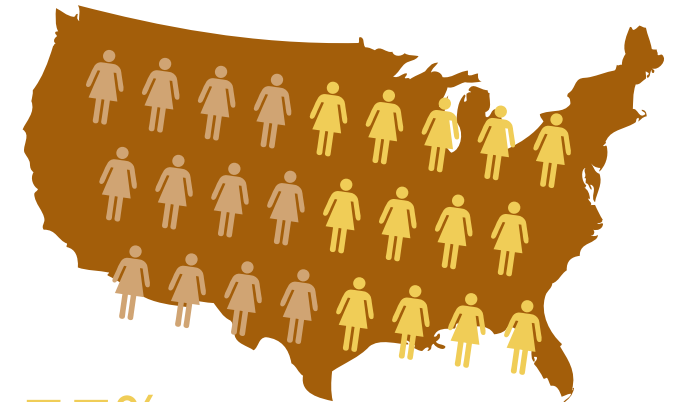
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The short answer is no. One in three people in the U.S. has some form of venous disease. That breaks down to 55% of women and 40 to 45% of men; of these, 20 to 25% of women and 10 to 15% of men will have visible varicose veins<sup>1</sup>.

However, gender does make a difference. Before we discuss how, let's briefly review how veins work.

## OVER HALF OF THE WOMEN IN THE U.S. HAVE SOME FORM OF VENOUS DISEASE



**55%** HAVE A FORM OF VENOUS DISEASE

1) Varicose veins and venous insufficiency. Society of Interventional Radiology web site. <http://www.sirweb.org/patients/varicose-veins/>. Accessed June 12, 2013.

# How your venous system works

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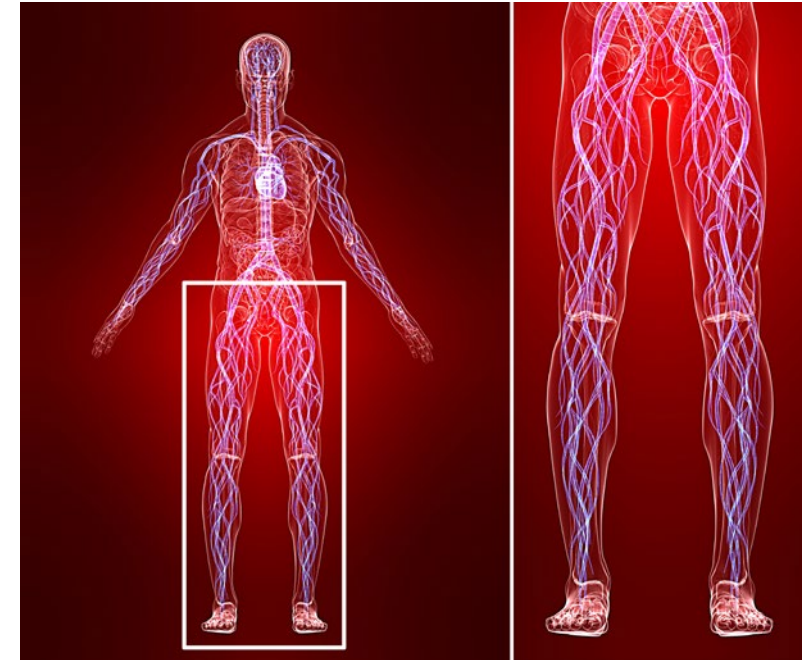
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Our legs are comprised of a network of veins that are similar to branches on a tree: they contain large, or major veins and increasingly smaller veins. Oxygenated blood is constantly being pumped from the heart to the rest of our bodies through arteries. Our veins carry deoxygenated blood back to the heart.

Healthy veins have valves, which open and close to assist the return of blood to the heart.

If these valves become damaged, then venous disease occurs.

## Circulatory System



Our veins carry deoxygenated blood back to the heart.

# What exactly is venous disease?

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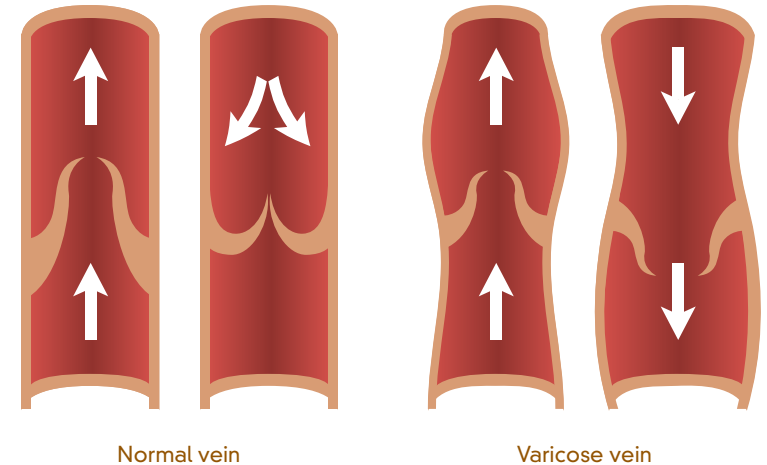
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Venous disease is defined as the impairment of blood flow back towards your heart. In other words, instead of healthy valves moving blood up, the damaged valves causes the blood to fall back down and “pool” in your legs or feet.

Over time, the increased pressure can cause additional valves to fail. If left untreated, it can lead to extreme leg pain, swelling, ulcers, and other health problems.

Venous disease is one of the most common conditions affecting our health. Many people have visible varicose veins, where others have no visible signs of the disease.

Venous disease is also called vein insufficiency or venous reflux.



# Symptoms of vein disease

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## VENOUS DISEASE SYMPTOMS INCLUDE:

- Visible varicose veins
- Spider veins
- Aching
- Heaviness
- Leg pain
- Swelling
- Fatigue in the legs
- Discomfort that worsens throughout the day or while standing
- Restless legs
- Redness or tightness
- Woody, brown appearance
- Skin changes
- Ulcers

When people encounter any of the symptoms of venous disease, they should be considered early stage symptoms of a serious medical disorder.

Though some people with venous disease may have severe physical symptoms, others may experience no symptoms at all.



# Risk factors for vein disease

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Some risk factors for developing venous disease include family history, age and environmental factors (such as standing on your legs for long periods of time). Another significant risk factor that is related to gender is fluctuations in hormones.

Women have three potential “high risk” times in life: menarche, pregnancy, and menopause. Why? Because the hormone progesterone can act as a vasodilator— something that opens or relaxes blood vessels— which causes the valves in the veins to stretch, sometimes to the point of damaging them.

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# How pregnancy impacts veins

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About forty percent of pregnant women are likely to develop varicose veins. During pregnancy, a combination of hormonal changes and increased pressure on the abdomen can cause varicose veins.

The most damage seems to happen in the first trimester, so if you have risk factors for vein disease, consider wearing graduated compression stockings, especially in the first three months. Many women feel so much relief that they wear them throughout the entire pregnancy.

Many women find that their varicose veins go away a few months after labor, while others continue to suffer with them.

## Consider this:

Some vein specialists recommend that women seek treatment for problematic veins before their first pregnancy, especially if there is a strong family history of vein issues. If a woman experienced vein discomfort during a pregnancy, she may want to consider treatment before her next pregnancy, as the problems may worsen.



# Compression stockings during pregnancy

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A woman's body goes through many changes during pregnancy, including an increase in blood volume and fluid. Fluid retention often causes swelling in the legs, ankles and feet. Graduated compression stockings promote good circulation. They help to reduce swelling and pain and, in many cases, can minimize or even prevent varicose veins.

Any woman with a family history of problem veins should wear full-length stockings (or at least knee-high stockings) throughout her entire first trimester.

Maternity graduated compression stockings are specially designed to fit more snugly at the ankles and calves and less so toward the top. The gradual change in compression helps the weak valves in the veins to circulate the blood more effectively.



Stockings come in a variety styles, sizes and strengths.

Pregnancy compression stockings (and body garments) are available with a doctor's prescription, and many maternity stores also offer them. There are panty hose styles with more room in the belly, specially designed to expand during pregnancy without restricting the abdomen. Accurate sizing is critical, so it is best to check with a doctor prior to purchasing any type of compression while pregnant.

# Veins as we age

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After menopause when most hormone fluctuations have stopped, a woman's risk of venous disease continues to increase with age. As the body gets older, a decrease in the production of collagen causes the veins to become weaker and the valves more likely to fail. For this reason, there is a higher incidence of varicose veins in older populations.

Older women may think varicose veins are a normal part of aging— that having legs that feel heavy or achy is “par for the course.” The truth is, there are solutions for women with vein symptoms, no matter what their age.

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# Treating veins today

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Modern treatment of varicose veins and other venous disorders is vastly different from traditional treatments of the past. Today's treatments are minimally invasive, virtually pain-free and involve less time. Many patients are able to get back to work and physical activity within days.

These new approaches to treatment are overwhelmingly successful over the long term when performed by an experienced phlebologist (vein specialist). Two of the most widely used treatments are EVLA and sclerotherapy.

## Did you know?

By treating the symptoms, people can stop the progression of vein disease and improve their quality of life.

# Laser treatments

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EVLA stands for “endovenous laser ablation.” (also called endovenous laser therapy, EVLT™, or radio frequency ablation, RFA). EVLA is a minimally invasive treatment used to treat large varicose veins in the legs. The procedure involves threading a small laser fiber into the vein at the failure location. Following a local anesthesia, blood flow is obstructed by irritating the vein wall and allowing the vein to close. The vein eventually disappears and is no longer visible on the surface of the leg. Blood is diverted to the many other healthy veins in the leg, and there is no ill effect from the loss of the troublesome vein.

## Did you know?

EVLA is considered the gold standard of varicose vein treatment, largely replacing older, more invasive procedures, such as vein stripping.

# Sclerotherapy

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Sclerotherapy is used to treat veins just below the skin's surface that are either invisible or difficult to see with the naked eye. In this procedure, small needles provide access to the vein so a medicine called a sclerosant agent can be injected into the vein's interior wall. This substance causes the vein to become sticky and seal shut, allowing the vein to disappear. Blood then finds a healthy path back to the heart. Sclerotherapy can be performed either with ultrasound guidance or light assistance.



Sclerotherapy is safe and effective and patients often experience an immediate relief of symptoms.

# Treatment is individual

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Just as every woman is unique, so should every health treatment plan be.

If you decide to pursue vein treatment, be clear about what you want. Do you want to wear skirts again? Do you want your legs to feel good even after standing on your feet all day? Or are you happy to control your venous reflux with compression therapy? Whatever your desired outcome, make sure you work with a doctor who will listen to you and help you achieve your goals.

## Consider this:

Seek out a vein specialist who has been certified by the American Board of Phlebology. Phlebologists are doctors who have been trained specifically in the care of veins and venous disease.



# Vein Healthcare Center

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At the *Vein Healthcare Center*, we're helping people understand vein health in a new way— through education, the most modern medical treatments and exceptional patient care.

Dr. Cindy Asbjornsen focuses on providing a comfortable setting where she can evaluate your individual symptoms and explore the best avenue for treatment. Dr. Asbjornsen is certified by the *American Board of Phlebology* and is currently the only vein specialist in Maine to be named a Fellow by the *American College of Phlebology*.

Please contact us if you are interested in a complete evaluation or a free educational visit.



The *Vein Healthcare Center* is near the Portland Jetport and the Maine Mall and is easily accessible from I-295, I-95, U.S. Route 1, and other local routes.

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