



For Immediate Release

Varicose veins and pregnancy: why it happens and how to treat it

April 30, 2012 (South Portland, ME) – About forty percent of pregnant women will develop [varicose veins](#), according to vein specialist Dr. Cindy Asbjornsen of the [Vein Healthcare Center in Maine](#).

“Hormone surges are part of the biological process of pregnancy, and varicose veins are sometimes part of that process,” said Dr. Asbjornsen. “If mothers-to-be pay attention to their [vein health](#), it can go a long way toward treating, or even preventing, a problem that has numerous solutions.”

Dr. Asbjornsen suggests a few tips to help decrease or prevent varicose veins during pregnancy:

- Wear graduated [compression stockings](#), especially in the first trimester.
- Exercise often— even a brisk walk will help circulation and reduce symptoms.
- Frequently pump the foot (heel to toe), even if on bed rest.
- Avoid tight clothes or high-heeled shoes.
- Gain only as much weight as recommended by the obstetrician.
- Take a pre-natal vitamin daily.

To better understand how varicose veins happen, here’s a quick review of how veins work. Veins carry blood from all the extremities back to the heart. The blood in the legs travels up against gravity, so when the valves in the veins become damaged, blood flows back into the legs to create a “pooling” effect. The hormone progesterone can act as a vasodilator— a hormone that opens or relaxes blood vessels— causing the valves in the veins to stretch significantly, sometimes to the point of damaging them. The result: varicose veins.

The first trimester is an especially important time to think about vein health. Women with known risk factors for venous disease should consider wearing compression stockings throughout the first three months of pregnancy and possibly longer. The most common risk factor is having a family history of venous disease.

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. Though pregnancy compression stockings (and body garments) are available with a doctor’s prescription, many maternity stores also offer them. Accurate sizing is critical, so it is best to check with a doctor prior to purchasing any type of compression while pregnant.

The second and third trimester may also carry some risk of developing varicose veins. The volume of blood in a healthy woman increases to about 50% more than before the pregnancy, with the largest increase in the second trimester. With more volume to move,

all of the blood vessels are under increased stress. In this final trimester, the uterus continues to expand and put pressure on the veins in the abdominal region. The most damage, however, seems to happen in the first trimester.

Many women find that their varicose veins go away a few months after labor, while others continue to suffer with them. There are many options available to [treat varicose veins](#) and typically cause very little pain and have high success rates.

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