

RADIOFREQUENCY ABLATION FOR THE TREATMENT OF VARICOSE VEINS

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS.

What is Radiofrequency Ablation?

Radiofrequency Ablation is a minimally invasive treatment for Varicose Veins which uses heat, generated by radiofrequency (microwave energy) to seal off the flow of blood to the varicose veins, diverting blood flow to the healthy veins nearby. This procedure can usually be performed under local anaesthetic and is done as a day case.

What does the Procedure Involve?

The procedure involves inserting a small catheter into the vein usually via a small incision in the leg or thigh. A small amount of local anaesthetic will be injected around the area to numb the skin. Once the catheter is inserted, a small probe will be passed down it to the top of the vein. Once the catheter is in place local anaesthetic is injected all around the vein to numb the area. The end of the catheter which transmits heat is then slowly pulled back along the length of the vein so that it heats and seals the vein. This causes the vein to collapse and the blood flow is redirected to the healthy veins nearby.

Following the Procedure.

After the catheter is removed from the treated vein a compression stocking will be applied to the leg. This may feel tight but should not feel so tight as to make your foot painful or discoloured. You will be required to keep the stocking in place for 7 days. After this time the stocking should continue to be worn, but only in the daytime. for a further 7 days; however you may remove it to shower or bathe. You will be encouraged to walk around very soon after the procedure and normal activity should be resumed within 1-2 days.

Benefits.

You should be able to leave hospital soon after the procedure. There is usually little or no pain with the procedure. There are virtually no scars as only one small incision is made and no stitches are used.

Those on blood-thinning tablets like warfarin do not have to stop it to have this treatment. Diabetic treatment does not have to be modified.

Most patients have immediate symptom relief and are able to return to normal activities within a day or two.

Possible Risks

- Some bruising and tenderness may occur but this may be alleviated by taking simple painkillers.
- Some instances of heat damage to the surrounding skin and nerves have been reported but this is rare and generally disappears after a short time.
- Thrombophlebitis (Inflammation of the vein) is not uncommon and may cause some pain and redness over the treated area but this generally responds well to non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as Ibuprofen.

- Blood clots can form in the deep veins in the leg (Deep Vein Thrombosis) and can also travel to the lungs (Pulmonary Embolism) however these side effects are rare.

Recurrent and Residual Varicose Veins.

Radiofrequency ablation for varicose veins is successful at closing the main vein in the majority of cases but occasionally small dilated branches that persist may require additional treatment with sclerotherapy (small injections).

General Information.

You may resume normal activities immediately, but avoid prolonged standing. Try to walk around as much as possible as this can reduce the risk of complications, such as Deep Vein Thrombosis.

Out Patient Follow Up.

You will be seen in the outpatient department usually 6-8 weeks after your procedure. However if you are experiencing any problems in the meantime then you can contact the Vascular Nurse Specialist through the secretaries or ring the vascular hotline directly