

How To Address Varicose Veins

Men and women alike suffer from varicose veins, which can be a cosmetic nuisance or a symptom of a serious medical condition. New varicose vein treatments are enabling individuals to live happier lives.

Varicose veins are enlarged, gnarled veins that can resemble the twisted roots of a tree. They develop when the one-way valves in veins that carry blood to the heart are faulty. Blood backs up in the veins as a result, and stretches the vein.

According to experts from Meridian Health, varicose veins are very common and affect half of all Americans ages 50 and older. But they're not just a concern for seniors. Anyone can develop varicose veins, but women are at a greater risk than men.

Varicose veins typically do not have any symptoms, except for the visual presence of deep blue or purple, bulging veins that largely occur on the legs and feet. However, aches in the legs, heavy feeling, itching around veins, or throbbing may also occur. Similar to varicose veins are spider veins, which are smaller and closer to the skin surface.

Pregnancy, age and stretching of the veins are contributors to varicose veins. Being overweight or standing for long durations of time are other contributors, as is wearing restrictive clothing.

There are a number of treatments that have been developed for varicose veins. During sclerotherapy, a solution is injected into a small or medium-sized vein to scar it and close it up. Eventually the vein will shrivel and fade. A similar procedure is done with lasers to shrink the vein without the need for needles or surgery. Catheter procedures use a heated tube inserted into the vein to collapse the vein and seal it shut. Vein stripping involves removing large veins through several small incisions. It is usually an outpatient procedure but will require a surgery.

In most cases, blood will naturally reroute to other veins in the legs after one of these procedures. Much of the blood flow in the legs is carried out by deeper veins. Individuals who undergo these procedures can usually walk directly after the surgery and full recovery is only a matter of a couple of weeks or more.

Feeling good about oneself involves being happy about what is on the inside and outside. Hiding legs and feet due to varicose veins can be embarrassing and uncomfortable, especially as the weather warms. Talk to a doctor about a recommendation to a vascular surgeon who can offer treatments for varicose veins.

Hobbies For Arthritis Sufferers

Individuals with arthritis are often stuck between a rock and a hard place. Doctors want people to exercise to keep up the range of motion in affected joints. However, even some limited movements can cause pain and suffering to those with arthritis. Furthermore, individuals with arthritis may shy away from the activities they once enjoyed because the pain is simply too overwhelming.

Instead of simply sitting on the couch watching television, there are a number of different things arthritis sufferers can do to pass the time and reconnect with past hobbies and interests. It might just take a little re-outfitting of the tools that are needed to participate.

Gardening

Gardening is a popular pastime for people of all ages. But the repetitive motions of digging and tilling as well as gripping a multitude of tools can take the joy out of the hobby. People with arthritis can make some changes. Raised garden beds or container gardening eliminates the stooping and bending associated with traditional gardening. With containers, individuals can place the containers on a counter or table and do all the work at a comfortable height.

Choosing low-maintenance plants is another option. Plants that don't require as much pruning or repotting are good for those with arthritis. Also, look for tools with larger



Container gardening is a hobby arthritis sufferers can enjoy.

grips and handles to be easier on arthritic hands.

Crafting

Many people with arthritis find the fine-detail work they grew accustomed to is not very comfortable with arthritis. Instead, there are many other crafts that can be prac-

tical.

Ceramics are one craft where the activity can also be the exercise. Using a pottery wheel or hand-molding doughs and other modeling media can be a way to stretch and work the hands and fingers. Using paintbrushes equipped with wider grips can make painting possible.

Mural painting is another option. Again, those with arthritis can choose tools with wide handles to make grasping easier. Large designs on walls or canvases will be easier to handle than smaller pieces.

Cooking

Cooking and baking is an art form that can be enjoyed by anyone. Furthermore, with ergonomic spoons, ladles and other kitchen tools, it has never been more convenient or less labor-intensive to be an accomplished home chef.

Baking and pastry creation is one area where people can show off creative skills. For those who love to bake but have trouble kneading and working dough, food processors, bread machines and kitchen stand mixers can take the work out of those processes.

Cooking is not only a rewarding hobby but also an activity that can benefit the household.

Having arthritis doesn't mean a person has to give up on the activities he or she enjoys. It merely involves a few tweaks that can still make these hobbies enjoyable.

Reduce Stress With Relaxation Must-Haves

Stress has become a daily part of people's lives. Despite its detriments to health and well-being, stress seems to be something most people can't shake. Increasing the number of relaxation tools around the house may prove effective at reducing stress.

Pick any number of surveys and you're likely to find that the general public is stressed out. A survey by Northwestern Natural Life indicates that 40 percent of workers report that their job is "very or extremely" stressful. A National Health Interview survey indicates that 75 percent of the general population experiences some stress every two weeks. Forty-two percent of people questioned by an American Psychological Association study found that stress has increased in the last few years.

Considering more than half of all Americans are concerned with the level of stress in their everyday lives, the following steps to reduce stress might be

very helpful to millions of people across the country.

Hot Tub

Water, heat and massage therapy as provided by a hot tub can alleviate many of the body strains caused by stress. Raising core body temperature for 15 minutes around 90 minutes before bed has been shown to induce a more restful sleep. Heat also dilates blood vessels to increase blood flow to sore or damaged tissue. In addition, water provides buoyancy that reduces strain on muscles and joints. Add the gentle massage from spa bubbles and the body is relaxed. This, in turn, can help turn off the mind and facilitate feelings of ease.

Exercise Equipment

Having a stationary bike, treadmill or elliptical trainer in the home can entice people to get moving. Exercise is a known mood-booster. In a 2007 study at Duke University, exercise was

shown to reduce major depression as well as standard antidepressant medication. Stress and depression are often linked. Exercise releases endorphins into the body, which can banish the blues. Other studies have shown that as little as ten minutes of brisk walking raises the mood and increases the energy level of people for up to two hours after the walk.

Massage

Few things can reduce stress as much as the feeling of human hands working the kinks out of tense muscles. Massage can alleviate pain, reduce anxiety and may even improve immune system function. There are many different types of massages available. A person can certainly invest in a massage table for home and have a spouse or family member do the massage. However, most prefer to visit a spa or rehabilitation center and rely on a trained professional.

Swimming

A pool, much like a hot tub, can foster feelings of relaxation. Swimming combines the stress-relief of water with the benefits of exercise. Daily swimming can shake off the stress of work and family life.

Alternative Therapies

Everything from acupuncture to aromatherapy to music therapy can be tried in an effort to staunch stress. Following in the footsteps of Eastern cultures, many people are finding meditation, yoga, deep breathing and Tai Chi are effective at calming the mind and the body. Look for local classes where these activities are offered, or simply try them at home.

Stress is something that is a part of most people's lives, but it doesn't have to be an overwhelming factor. With a few simple stress-relief techniques, individuals can feel calmer and healthier.



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Important Health Screenings For Men

Health screenings are important for men of all ages. Whether you're a young man, middle-aged or enjoying your golden years, screening tests are an important part of staying healthy. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality offers the following screening test guidelines for men hoping to stay as healthy as possible as they age.

- **Abdominal aortic aneurysm:** Men between the ages of 65 and 75 who have ever been smokers should speak with their doctor about a screening for abdominal aortic aneurysm. This condition is a bulging in the abdominal aorta, the largest artery in the body. Should an abdominal aortic aneurysm burst, this can cause dangerous bleeding and possibly even death.

- **Colorectal cancer:** Men should start being screened for colorectal cancer at the age of 50. For men with a family history of colorectal cancer, it might be a good idea to get screened before the age of 50. There are different ways to screen for colorectal cancer, and the doctor will likely discuss the best screening for each individual patient.

- **High blood pressure:** Blood pressure should be checked at least every two years starting at the age of 18. High blood pressure, which is 140/90 or higher, can lead to a number of life threatening ailments, including strokes, heart failure, heart attacks, and kidney or eye prob-

lems, so it's important for men of all ages to control their blood pressure and get regular screenings.

- **High cholesterol:** Men 35 years of age and older should have their cholesterol checked annually. Younger men who make certain lifestyle choices or have existing medical conditions should have their cholesterol checked starting at age 20. This includes young men who use tobacco, are obese, have diabetes, have a personal history of heart disease, or have a male family member who had a heart attack before age 50, or a female relative who had a heart attack before age 60.

- **Diabetes:** Men should get screened for diabetes if their blood pressure is higher than 135/80 or if they take medication for high blood pressure.

- **Depression:** Many men might not know it, but there are screenings for depression. Men concerned about depression should speak with their physician if they have felt down, sad or hopeless or if they have felt little interest or pleasure in doing things.

To learn more about health screenings, visit the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality at www.ahrq.com.

Hearing loss among American adolescents is surging. So says a 2010 report published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, in which researchers found that 19.5 percent of children sampled between the ages of 12 to 19 in 2005 and 2006 had some hearing loss. That's a considerable increase from the 14.9 percent of children in the same age group who had some hearing loss between 1988 and 1994.

What's especially troubling about the report's findings is that once a person has hearing loss, their risk of progressive hearing loss as they age is greater. So even small hearing loss today can, over time, evolve into significant hearing loss. Much of this spike in hearing loss could be the result of frequent earbuds use, which are tiny electric speakers that commonly accompany personal MP3 players. Earbuds are convenient, but many fear that convenience could come at the cost of an individual's hearing, particularly for children, who are among the most frequent users of personal musical players and, consequently, earbuds. Concerned parents can protect their children's ears from hearing loss in a number of ways.

- **Recognize symptoms.** Symptoms of hearing loss include pain in the ears, buzzing or ringing in the ears and even trouble correctly hearing words. Should a child exhibit any of these symptoms, visit an audiologist as soon as possible.

- **Reduce risks.** Childhood noise risks are many, and it's up to parents to reduce a child's

exposure to such risks. The American Academy of Audiology notes that some of the common childhood noise risks are concerts, sporting events, arcades, shop class, and even noisy toys. Avoid giving young children very noisy toys, and encourage them to keep the volume down when playing video games. When taking a child to a concert, avoid sitting too close to the stage, where the noise is often at its loudest.

- **Promote hearing protection.** Noise-induced hearing loss can occur whenever there is prolonged exposure to sounds louder than 85 decibels (dB). To put that in perspective, a hair dryer typically operates at 90 dB and an ambulance siren might be 130 dB. Encourage kids to wear prop-

er hearing protection, including earplugs, whenever the noise levels are likely to exceed 85 dB, such as if they'll be attending noisy concerts or sporting events. Earplugs won't make it impossible to enjoy a concert, and they will provide the added protection kids need.

- **Turn down the volume.** Personal music players can reach great volumes, which can do significant damage. Encourage kids to turn down the volume when using personal music players. A good barometer is if kids can hear external sounds beyond their earbuds. If kids can't hear nearby conversation while listening to their personal music player, the volume is too loud.

- **Aside from ear plugs, don't put anything in kids' ears.** Don't remove wax or dirt from ears with fingers, cotton wool or cotton swabs. Nothing besides an ear plug should ever go into a person's ear, regardless of how old that person is.

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