

Advice for patients after laser treatment of varicose veins

Day Surgery Unit Patient Information Leaflet

Introduction

This leaflet is for patients who have had laser treatment of varicose veins. It gives advice on what you should do when you get home, and contact information for if you have any problems relating to your procedure.

Why are lasers used to treat varicose veins?

Laser treatment is one of the latest forms of treatment that can be offered for certain patients with varicose veins. It is not suitable for all types of varicose veins. It can only be used on a certain group of patients who have a long, and fairly straight, segment of vein in their leg.

What are the benefits of this treatment?

It is a very safe procedure with very few complications. Patients have less pain and bruising after treatment than with the standard surgical stripping procedure, which is the traditional treatment for varicose veins. In addition, most people recover quicker with laser treatment than traditional varicose vein surgery.

Is it safe?

There is good evidence that the procedure is very safe and efficient. It causes complete closure of the main varicose vein trunk in nearly all patients.

Studies have shown that, two years after this treatment, the vein remained closed in 93 per cent of patients. In another study, there were no new recurrences seen of varicose veins. These results are better than for traditional varicose vein surgery.

What are the risks?

The most common risks are pain and bruising along the vein that has been treated. However, it is well documented that these symptoms are relatively mild compared to surgical stripping.

Occasionally, there may be some damage to the skin, and skin burn is possible on the skin over the area being treated.

Nerve damage is an unpleasant side effect of laser treatment, particularly if the main vein behind your knee has been treated. This is called the short saphenous vein.

However, all these complications are milder and less frequent than the standard surgical treatment.

What happens during the procedure?

The operation is carried out under ultrasound guidance, using a local anaesthetic injected into the thigh with a fine needle. This means that the area will be numb so that you cannot feel pain. You will be awake during the procedure.

Occasionally, if you are having other procedures as well, you may need to have a general anaesthetic, where you are asleep. Your consultant will discuss this with you.

During the procedure, the surgeon inserts a fine tube (catheter) into the vein through which a laser fibre is passed up to the groin. The laser energy will be delivered through this fibre into the vein. This causes it to heat and shrivel up. Usually it is painless when this happens.

What happens after the procedure?

After the procedure, we will give you a tight compression stocking to wear for one to two weeks. You will need to take a painkiller such as paracetamol on a regular basis for up to a week (always read the label; do not exceed the recommended dose).

Specific advice

- You need to wear the compression stocking(s) on your leg(s) during the day and at night for seven to 14 days, until any stitches are taken out. We will give you specific instructions about this before you go home.
- After this, you will need to wear the stocking(s) for another five weeks, during the daytime only. You can wash the stockings using lukewarm water with no detergent, and dry them flat. Do not tumble dry them.
- If you experience discomfort with your stocking such as tightness, do not cut the stocking or roll it down your leg as this can act as a tight band, affecting the blood flow in the leg. If you experience any problems, please contact one of the helpline numbers at the end of this leaflet.
- Until the stitches are removed, you will not be able to have a bath or shower. We will give you specific instructions for this before you go home.
- It is important to remain active after your operation and you should start walking the morning after your operation. Try to walk at least three 20 minute walks a day, spacing the walks out throughout the day.
- As the days progress, walking will become easier and you can increase the amount you walk.

- You will probably experience some pain or tenderness after your operation. Sharp pain or numb areas are fairly common after varicose vein surgery. This is due to damage to very tiny skin nerves which run along the veins. This can last approximately one week.
- It is not unusual for the wound to bleed on the day of operation. If it does, do not panic. Sit down and raise your leg on a bed, settee or chair. You should apply continuous pressure over the stocking where the bleeding is, for five to 15 minutes. This should stop the bleeding.

If after this time the bleeding has not stopped, continue applying pressure and contact one of the helpline numbers at this end of this leaflet.

- Do not drive for two weeks after the surgery.
- It is not unusual for your leg(s) to be bruised in appearance or hard and tender to touch, after your operation. Over the course of several weeks, the bruising, tenderness and/or discoloration should become less noticeable.
- Occasionally, it may take a few months for the bruising to clear up completely.
- Remember: everyone recovers differently after surgery, so do not worry if you feel tired and weak for several days. This is quite normal. However, if this feeling lasts for a long time, please see your GP.
- If you have any problems or worries after your operation, such as a lot of pain or bleeding over and above what you would expect from a small cut, do not hesitate to contact one of the helpline numbers.

You can use these helpline numbers for 14 days after your operation. If you have any problems or queries after the 14 days, please contact your GP.

If you need a sick note, please ask the nurse who books you in for the procedure.

Scarring

You will have small cuts on your treated leg. Usually these should fade away in 12 to 18 months. However, any skin damage or pigmentation that you had before surgery may be permanent.

Nerve damage

Damage to small skin nerves is common and can cause temporary symptoms of pain or numbness. Very rarely, a more important nerve can get damaged, particularly if you have had an operation on the back of your knee. This can cause patches of numbness either in the short or long term.

Air travel

It is not advisable to fly within six weeks of your surgery. The fact that you have had varicose vein surgery does not reduce your risk of developing deep vein thrombosis. To help avoid this when you do fly, the current advice is to wear support stockings or tights and try to move around during long haul flights.

Will my varicose vein come back?

Varicose veins have a habit of appearing elsewhere, once the main vein has been treated. This can happen whichever type of treatment you have. However, the chances of the same vein being affected are much less with laser treatment than with traditional surgery.

Helpline numbers

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please speak to a member of staff or contact:

Russells Hall Hospital Day Surgery Unit on
01384 456111 ext. 1886 (7.30am to 8pm, Monday to Friday)

or

Pre-operative Assessment Unit on
01384 456111 ext. 1849 (7am to 7.30pm, Monday to Friday)

Out of these hours, urgent queries: contact Surgical Assessment Unit on 01384 456111 ext. 3359.

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:

<http://dudleygroup.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/general-surgery/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email patient.information@dgh.nhs.uk

Reference

National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (2004)
Endovenous laser treatment of the long saphenous vein NICE interventional procedure guidance [IPG52]. NICE: London. Available at:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/IPG52/chapter/2-The-procedure>

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.

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此宣传单可提供大字版本、音频版本和其它语言版本，请拨打电话：0800 073 0510。

Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

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Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru vă rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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