

# Varicose vein treatment – radiofrequency ablation (ClosureFast)

## Vascular Surgery Patient Information Leaflet

### Introduction

This leaflet is to help answer any questions you may have about radiofrequency ablation (RFA) treatment for your varicose veins. The leaflet explains the benefits and risks of the procedure, what to expect when you come into hospital and how you need to care for yourself after the procedure.

If you need any more information on the procedure, please speak to a member of the vascular team caring for you.

### What is RFA?

It is a treatment for varicose veins, also known as ClosureFast treatment. During the treatment, a catheter powered by radiofrequency energy is used to apply direct heat to the vein wall which causes it to shrink and close.

RFA has been approved by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE, [www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)), which assesses the safety and effectiveness of all new treatments.

## **What are the benefits of RFA?**

Traditional surgery for varicose veins involves making a cut in your groin to remove the affected vein. This is known as stripping. It is carried out using a general anaesthetic which means you are asleep for the procedure.

RFA is usually performed using a local anaesthetic which is medication that numbs a specific area of your body so it is pain free. This means that you will have a faster recovery and it avoids the risks associated with a general anaesthetic.

RFA avoids the cut in your groin and much of the bruising around the area where the vein is stripped. This means you are less likely to get a scar, complications such as a wound infection and pain after the surgery.

## **What are the risks of RFA?**

As with any medical procedure, RFA does have potential risks and complications. These include:

- Once the local anaesthetic wears off, you may get some pain and bruising along the line of the treated vein.
- Two or three out of every 100 patients may develop a lot of inflammation which will cause discomfort and lumpiness around the vein. This is known medically as phlebitis. This should settle after a few weeks.

Other risks are low but can occur. These include:

- Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) – this is possible but happens less with RFA than with traditional stripping techniques.
- Numbness or pain related to damage to skin nerves. This is not common and is usually temporary.
- Burns to the skin which can occur during the heating process or can be caused by the dressings applied at the end of the operation.

## **What happens before the procedure?**

We want to involve you in all decisions about your care and treatment. After your consultation, if you decide to go ahead with the procedure, we will ask you to sign a consent form. In addition, as with any hospital procedure, we will need to take routine swabs for MRSA.

## **What will happen during the procedure?**

The procedure is usually performed using a local anaesthetic. Your surgeon will:

- Numb your skin with a local anaesthetic injection before making a small cut (two millimetres long) over the varicose vein.
- Put a tiny tube called a catheter into the vein that needs the treatment. Ultrasound images are used to make sure it is in the right place.
- Inject local anaesthetic and a cooling saline fluid along the length of the vein.
- Activate the radiofrequency energy to deliver heat to the vein wall. The vein wall shrinks and the vein is sealed closed (see figure 1).
- Slowly remove the catheter and use an ultrasound scan to check that the procedure has been successful.
- Put a dressing over the small cut.

In addition, often the surgeon will make a number of small cuts (one millimetre long) in the skin over the bulging vein so that it can be removed. This is also carried out under local anaesthetic. It is known medically as a phlebectomy.

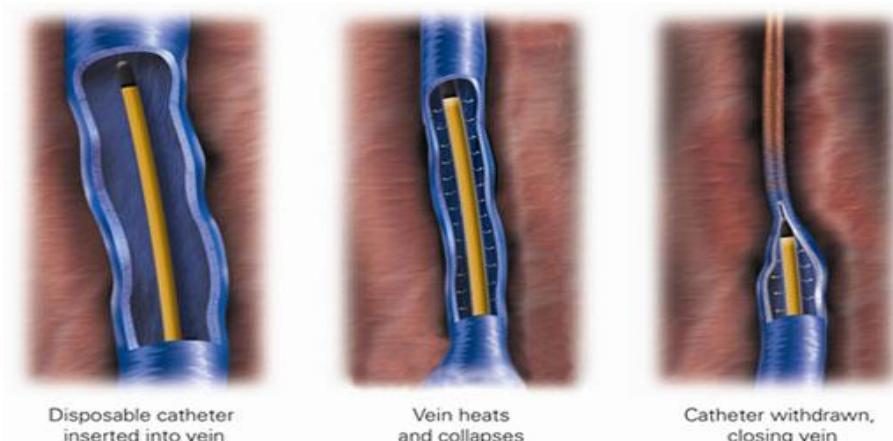


Figure 1 shows radiofrequency ablation treatment of a varicose vein

## What happens after RFA and when I go home?

A support stocking is usually fitted on your leg after the procedure. Your surgeon will advise you about how long you will need to wear this but it may be for a few weeks.

You will be able to walk out of the hospital after your procedure, after the nursing staff have checked your blood pressure and dressings. You should not drive home and; therefore, you will need to arrange appropriate transport.

## Pain relief

Your leg may be a little uncomfortable once the local anaesthetic has worn off and your leg will be slightly swollen. Painkillers such as paracetamol, if you can take it, should be adequate to treat this pain (always read the label; do not exceed the recommended dose).

## Exercise

We recommend that you take a minimum of three 20 minute walks each day after the procedure.

Avoid strenuous exercise for a few days and then gradually build up the amount you do.

## **Driving**

You should not drive for at least 48 hours after RFA and you should only drive when you are pain free and able to safely perform an emergency stop.

## **Going back to work**

You can usually return to work after 36 hours depending on your recovery and the type of work that you do.

## **Air travel**

We do not advise any form of air travel for at least four weeks after the procedure.

## **Will I have a follow-up appointment?**

If your surgeon recommends that you have a follow-up appointment, we will arrange this for you. We will send you this appointment by post, and it will usually take place six to eight weeks after the procedure. You will be able to discuss the results of your treatment at this time.

## **Can I find out more?**

You can find out more from the following weblink:

### **NHS Choices**

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/varicose-veins/treatment/>

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

Sharron Cole or Vicky Baker – Vascular Clinical Nurse Specialists on

01384 456111 ext. 2456 (8am to 4pm, Monday to Friday)

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

**This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:**

<http://dudleygroup.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/vascular-service/>

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

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

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Aceasta brosura poate fi pusa la dispozitie tiparita cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau in alte limbi, pentru acest lucru va rugam sunati la 0800 073 0510.

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