

Patient information from BMJ

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Varicose veins: self-help

Doctors often recommend patients take certain steps to help prevent or treat varicose veins. There hasn't been enough good research to know for certain how much these steps help. But the idea behind most of these suggestions is to improve your blood flow and muscle tone.

- Maintain a healthy weight, so that the veins in your legs aren't under too much pressure.
- Do regular exercise (such as walking, running, swimming, or cycling).
- Eat a balanced diet. It should contain enough fiber to stop you from getting constipated (straining to pass bowel movements has been linked to varicose veins). Foods high in fiber include fresh fruits and vegetables, and foods with whole grains like bran.
- Avoid long periods of standing or sitting (unless your feet are raised). If you have to stand, shift your weight from one leg to the other every few minutes.
- When possible, rest with your feet up (above the level of your heart). You could lie down with your legs resting on three or four pillows, for example.
- Consider wearing support stockings. These may help with aching and swelling.
- Avoid clothing that is tight around your waist, groin, or legs. This type of clothing can make your symptoms worse. (Support stockings are tight around your legs, but they are designed to help your blood to flow upward.)
- Some doctors advise not crossing your legs when sitting, as this may affect your blood flow.
- Stop smoking. Smoking damages blood vessels, so it might increase your chance of varicose veins.

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