

Does insurance cover vein ablation?

Many insurance carriers cover venous insufficiency treatments, based on medical necessity for symptom relief.

What is an interventional radiologists?

Interventional radiologists are doctors who specialize in minimally invasive, targeted-treatments performed using imaging for guidance. They use their expertise in reading X-rays, ultrasound, MRI and other diagnostic imaging, to guide tiny instruments, such as catheters, through blood vessels or through the skin to treat diseases without surgery. Your interventional radiologist will work closely with your primary care or other physicians to be sure you receive the best possible care.



You or a member of your family has been referred to an interventional radiologist for treatment. This brochure will answer some of the questions you may have about the medical specialty and how an interventional radiologist can help you.



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Questions and Answers about Varicose Veins and Venous Insufficiency

What is venous insufficiency?

Common condition that results from decreased blood flow from the leg veins up to the heart, with pooling of blood in the veins. Valves in the veins keep blood flowing toward the heart. When the valves become weak and do not close properly, the blood flows backwards – commonly called “reflux”.

What are varicose veins?

Veins that have lost their effectiveness become rope-like, bulged, and thickened. A swollen vessel is known as a varicose vein and are a result of increased pressure from reflux. Common cause of varicose veins in the legs is reflux in the thigh vein called the great saphenous, which leads to pooling in the vein.

How common is venous disease and varicose veins?

Chronic venous disease of the legs is a very common condition. Approximately half of the population in the U.S. has venous disease. A larger percent of these patients are women. Varicose veins affect one out of two people age 50 and older, and 15 to 25 percent of all adults.

What are the symptoms of varicose veins or venous insufficiency?

Symptoms vary and might include aching pain, easily tired legs, leg heaviness, all of which worse as the day progresses. Many find they need to sit and/or elevate their legs to relieve the symptoms. In extreme cases, venous insufficiency and reflux can cause darkening of the skin and wounds that may be difficult to treat. A large percent of patients over the age of 60 have chronic wounds known as ulcers.

Who is at risk for varicose veins?

Risk factors include age, family history, female gender and pregnancy. In women, pregnancy, especially multiple pregnancies, is one of the most common factors that will increase the severity of varicose veins.

How is venous insufficiency diagnosed?

Your interventional radiologist, a doctor specially trained in performing minimally invasive treatments using imaging for guidance, will use ultrasound to assess the venous blood flow changes, which can assist in diagnosing venous insufficiency. The interventional radiologist will map the greater saphenous vein and examine the deep and superficial venous systems to determine if the veins are open and to locate any reflux. This will assist the radiologist to determine if you are a candidate for minimally invasive treatment – vein ablation.

What is vein ablation treatment?

This minimally invasive treatment is an outpatient procedure performed using imaging guidance. Local anesthetic is applied to the vein, the interventional radiologist inserts a thin catheter, similar in size to a piece of spaghetti, into the vein and guides it up the great saphenous vein located in the thigh. Then a laser or radiofrequency energy is applied to the inside of the vein. This heats the vein and seals the vein closed.



Before treatment



After treatment

Reflux within the great saphenous veins leads to pooling in the varicose vein. By closing the great saphenous vein, the twisted and varicosed branch veins, which are close to the skin, shrink and improve in appearance. Once the diseased vein is closed, other healthy veins take over to carry blood from the leg, re-establishing normal flow.



Before treatment



After treatment

The benefits of vein ablation?

Successful treatment takes less than an hour and provides immediate relief of symptoms. You can return to your normal activity immediately with little or no pain. There could be minor soreness or bruising which can be treated with over-the-counter pain relievers. There will be no scarring due to the procedure not requiring a surgical incision. Just a small nick about the size of a pencil tip.

Are there other treatments for varicose veins?

Injection sclerotherapy is another option to treat some varicose and nearly all spider veins. A fine needle is used to inject the vein with a solution which shrinks the vein. This is often done after vein ablation to improve the appearance of any remaining spider veins.