

VARICOSE VEINS

New technology heals an ancient problem

by Steven Gale, MD

Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics and 3000-year-old Greek statues don't look anything alike, but some of them have one thing in common—they depict human figures with varicose veins. The original physician, Hippocrates, described these painfully distended leg veins and the earliest treatments for them in the fifth century BC, and the doctors who followed him have been searching for solutions ever since. And across the millennia, they've pretty much failed—until now.

Today, upwards of 25 million Americans suffer from the pain, swelling, leg fatigue, and disfigurement of severe varicose veins. The condition occurs when the one-way valves in a primary leg vein can no longer push blood back up towards the heart, so the blood pools in the legs, causing surface vessels to bulge out and the ankles to swell. If the problem is bad enough, leg ulcers and blood clots can occur. Women are twice as likely as men to have varicose veins, partly because pregnancy is one of the major risk factors, along with heredity—if your mom had them, you likely will too. People who work on their feet, like nurses and teachers, are especially vulnerable, and as we get up in years, the problem becomes more common. More than half of all seniors will eventually develop the condition. Left untreated, severe varicose veins just get worse, often causing leg ulcers and other permanent skin damage, and the pain can be disabling. But until just recently, the only real surgical option was vein stripping, a gruesome operation that has been around for nearly a century (and unfortunately is still in use). Using multiple incisions and a cable device, the surgeon literally rips the diseased vein out of the leg. It's done in the OR under a general anesthetic, and the patient is left with a slow, painful recovery and permanent scars.

Fortunately, the same kind of medical technology that revolutionized heart surgery a generation ago has finally caught up with varicose veins. We're now using minimally invasive catheter procedures that are performed in a doctor's office under local anesthetic, procedures that can resolve even severe,

long-term cases of varicose veins in a matter of minutes.

Here's how the technology works: After using ultrasound to diagnose the problem, the physician will insert the catheter into the diseased primary vein, usually the great saphenous vein in the thigh. Thermal energy is delivered through the catheter into the vein, and the heat causes the vein walls to collapse around the catheter. As the device is pulled slowly back down the vein, the vessel is sealed shut. The body then automatically re-routes blood flow through more functional veins, restoring healthier circulation, and the distended surface veins quickly begin to deflate. It's a safe, quick procedure that makes vein stripping look positively barbaric.

Both laser and radiofrequency (RF) catheters have been used for the technique over the past few years, but the newest generation of the technology is a big step forward. It's an RF device called ClosureFast that can seal the entire length of the vein in two or three minutes with virtually no discomfort for the patient—eliminating the pain and bruising that are common with the older laser devices. Clinical studies have found the ClosureFast more than 97% effective and significantly superior to all previous technologies.

The recovery time is essentially zero. Patients hop off the table and quickly resume normal activity. Most patients feel an immediate, dramatic improvement in the pain and heaviness, and the surface swelling and discoloration dissipate over the next week or two. For patients who may have been suffering from severe varicose veins for years or even decades, it's an astonishing change.

The procedure is eminently affordable for most people because as a medical treatment—it's intended for people with significant symptoms, not just cosmetic spider veins—it's generally covered by health insurance and Medicare.

It's been a million years since our ancestors began to walk upright, and a few thousand since doctors began trying to treat the varicose veins that resulted. We finally have a fast, safe, and comfortable way to deal with



Before



After

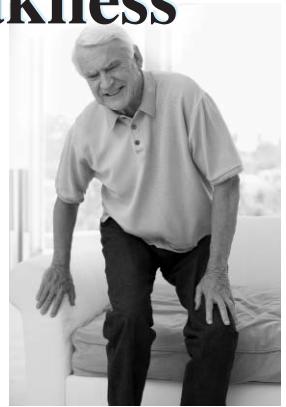
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Do you or a family member suffer from muscle weakness due to stroke? If so, you are invited to participate in a research study with an investigational agent.

Over a three-week period, qualified participants will receive six infusions containing an investigational agent or placebo (inactive agent). Muscle strength and parameters of functional status will be measured periodically over the following three months after the infusions are completed.

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- Have moderate muscle weakness, 3 months to 4 years after a stroke
- Be healthy enough to come to the office for study procedures and follow-up
- Be free of other conditions that might cause muscle weakness
- Be able to communicate verbally with the study staff



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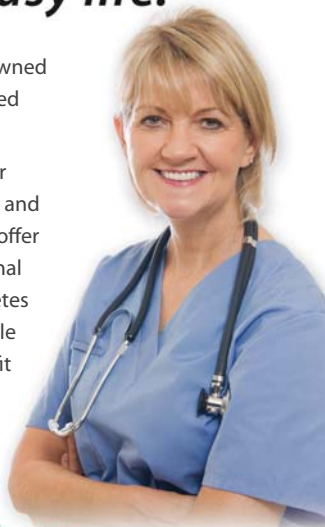
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this ancient problem. For millions of people with achy, swollen legs, that's something to celebrate. ❧

Steven Gale, MD, is a board-certified vascular surgeon in Toledo. For more information, please call 419-291-2090.

ProMedica provides commonsense tips for

Maintaining healthier indoor air quality

With winter on its way, area residents are closing up their homes, firing up their furnaces, weatherproofing their windows and doors, and generally preparing to hibernate indoors until balmy weather returns. While sealing up your home will help to keep you cozy and warm, it also increases the potential for indoor-air-quality issues to arise.

The risk of indoor air pollution should be viewed as motivation to implement reasonable preventive measures, and not be considered a cause for alarm. According to Susan Raszka, Environmental Affairs Specialist with ProMedica Health System, there are several simple, commonsense steps you can take to maintain the healthiest possible indoor air this winter. "The good news is, most major air-quality problems can be avoided through proper home maintenance and upkeep," Raszka says.

There are five major areas of concern when thinking about improving or maintaining good indoor air quality:

Carbon monoxide

The most serious indoor-air-quality problem is the presence of carbon

monoxide in the home. This colorless, tasteless, odorless gas is a byproduct of combustion and can cause sudden illness and death. To prevent its buildup in the home, Raszka recommends having your furnace, water heater, and any other fuel-burning appliances serviced annually by a qualified technician.

"Space heaters, especially kerosene heaters, are a big problem at this time of year because there's always the potential for them to produce particulate emissions," Raszka notes. "Electric models don't have this problem, but any fuel-fired space heater must be properly vented to the outside."

Mold

There are thousands of species of mold, and individual susceptibility to health problems stemming from exposure to mold varies considerably. One form that many people are aware of is *Stachybotrys* mold, sometimes known as "black mold," which has been linked with a variety of health problems.

Raszka states that mold needs a moist environment to thrive and that some forms require anaerobic (low oxygen) conditions, as well. In general, if you have warm, moist conditions, you're likely going to get some mold, but it does not have to be a problem. *Stachybotrys* colonies grow es-



To prevent carbon monoxide poisoning, have your fuel-burning appliances serviced annually.

How to find out more about The Home Caddy

Last month's issue of *Healthy Living News* featured an article about a groundbreaking new product, called The Home Caddy, which was developed by local inventor Jim Ringholz.

The Home Caddy is a portable toilet mounted on a sliding platform that is designed to be placed in front of any upright lounge or easy chair. Using minimal arm strength, the user can easily transfer from the chair onto the toilet and back again. Included in the package price of this innovative product is a bookcase specially designed to hold several small appliances as well as a second, stationary Home Caddy designed specifically for bedside use.

The idea behind The Home Caddy is not only to keep people with limited mobility at home, but also to keep them as self-sufficient as possible whenever they are home alone.

If you read the article and wanted more information about The Home Caddy—perhaps because, like Jim, someone close to you is limited by mobility problems—you might have noticed that we omitted part of the contact phone number. We regret any confusion or inconvenience this might have caused.

To learn more about The Home Caddy, please call 419-309-4507 or visit www.thehomecaddy.com.