

New Treatment for Varicose Veins

by Chad McKenzie, M.D.

Anthropologists tell us that human ancestors first walked upright about 1.5 million years ago. Unfortunately, in all that time our leg veins have never quite adjusted. About four in ten adult women in the U.S. suffer from severe varicose veins, those big, ropey leg veins that discolor your legs and can cause pain, swelling and even skin ulcers. If you have the condition, you don't need me to tell you how much those heavy, achy legs can slow you down during your busy day and how much they can hurt when the day is over.

Varicose veins occur when the one-way valves in your primary leg veins can no longer push blood back up towards your heart, and it pools up in the vessels instead, distending them painfully. It's a condition called venous reflux, and women are twice as likely as men to suffer from it. Heredity is a major factor—if your mom had varicose veins, you probably will too—and while the condition has kind of an old-people image, I see it in young mothers and even teenagers. Pregnancy is a major risk factor, and professions that keep you vertical, like nursing and teaching, may increase the risk as well.

Varicose veins have been frustrating women and their doctors for thousands of years, all the way back to the ancient Egyptians and Greeks. The first true physician, Hippocrates, wrote about the subject in the fifth century BC. Unfortunately, for most of history, medicine had no good answers. Up until about ten years ago, if measures like compression

stockings didn't reduce the pain and swelling, general surgery was required to remove the primary surface vein in the leg, which is called the greater saphenous vein. The procedure was called vein stripping, and it involved literally pulling the diseased saphenous vein out of the leg with a device. It required an operating room, a general anesthetic, and sometimes weeks of painful recovery for the patient, and it didn't always work.

Over the past decade, however, the same medical technology breakthroughs we've seen in cardiac surgery have finally caught up with varicose veins as well. Even severe cases can now be treated right in the doctor's office with a procedure called vein ablation, using minimally invasive catheters and local anesthetics. The doctor threads the catheter into the greater saphenous vein and heats it with either radiofrequency (RF) energy or laser energy, causing the vein walls to collapse inward and seal shut in a matter of seconds. The device is pulled slowly up the full length of the vein from the knee to the groin, and the vein is permanently closed, to be eventually absorbed by the body. With the blood now flowing through healthier veins, normal circulation is restored, and those big ropey veins quickly begin to deflate.

Both radiofrequency and laser are safe and effective. Lasers operate at about 900 degrees Fahrenheit and literally scorch the veins shut, which means the procedure can be somewhat painful and tends to cause residual bruises. The new ClosureFast RF device now available to patients in our office operates at only

about 250 degrees Fahrenheit and tends to be a lot easier on the patient's tissues as well as being faster than previous technologies. Doctors can now complete the entire procedure in less than three minutes, and the patient usually won't feel a thing.

The initial impact of the procedure is almost instantaneous. Usually the patient will stand up afterwards—a horizontal-to-vertical transition that has caused pain for years—and discover the pain is gone. They'll walk right out and go back to work or out to lunch. And over the next week or two, they'll watch the swollen veins dissipate and the appearance of the leg improve dramatically. Because ablation is primarily performed for medical reasons, rather than cosmetic, the procedure is usually covered by health insurance and

Medicare.

Venous reflux is definitely one of those diseases that doesn't play fair between the genders, but men get varicose veins too, and men and women alike are getting great results with this new technology. And everybody enjoys being able to put on a pair of shorts and hit the beach. ■



Dr. Chad McKenzie is a vascular surgeon at Commonwealth Vein Center with offices in Chesapeake (757-483-9611) and Portsmouth (757-397-2383).

EnCore Pilates and Physical Therapy



Paula D. Cole, MPT
Licensed Physical Therapist
Certified Polestar Pilates Practitioner
Certified Pilates Method Alliance Teacher
337 Main St. • Smithfield, VA • 408-4068

Considering a Career Change?

- Explore Career Options
- Write a Job-Winning Resume
- Learn Effective Search Strategies

FREE Weekly Job Search Assistance

FREE 10-minute Phone Consultation

Beach Counseling & Career Center

757-306-9100

www.beachcounselingcenter.com

Evening & Saturday appointments available

Buyers... WOW, What a Market!

SEASHORE REALTY
& Property Management, Inc.

Call to schedule your FREE Lunch and Learn

301-8550



When it comes to IMAGE,
Results Rule
and SANDY gets results!



www.theimagearchitect.com

For details, call (757) 627-6669.

Visit www.theimagearchitect.com for a FREE 5-Part Image Course!

TW
TIDEWATER WOMEN

Don't Miss an Issue!
Subscribe today
\$15 per year

Send this form & your check for \$15 for 12 issues to:
Tidewater Women, 3065 Mansfield Lane, Va. Beach, VA 23457

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Delivered to your mailbox • Send your check today!