

MY LEGS HURT, DR. KAMRAN.

Do I have venous insufficiency?

The headline poses a common question. Let me begin answering it with a brief description of circulation.

Blood gets oxygen from the lungs, goes to the heart and gets pumped through arteries to the body's extremities depleting its oxygen supply along the way and then gets back to the lungs and heart through the veins. Although the heart pumps blood easily through the arteries, there is not as much pressure left to push it back through the veins back to the heart. In fact, the pressure by the time the blood gets to the vein side is pretty much zero.

The way the blood can get back to the heart and lungs is through another pump and that is your calf and leg muscles. These are not as strong as your heart so we need valves in the veins so that when the calf muscles relax, the blood does not fall backward into your feet.

These valves, usually due to genetic predisposition, fail and cause the blood to stay trapped in the veins. The veins then bulge and protrude and, like a domino effect, destroy other valves causing venous insufficiency. This problem gets worse with time as the bulges get bigger and bigger.

A few things you can do to slow this down is to avoid sitting or standing still for extended periods of time. Walk as much as you can. Also, wear compression stockings whenever you can to help push the blood back out of these veins back toward the heart.

When the blood can't get out of your leg, it loses most of the oxygen, the legs ache and the pressure builds up in the legs causing a heavy feeling and the legs gradually swell up, particularly at the end of the day. Some red cells ooze out of the vessels and die like a "fish out of water." This causes dark pigmentation in the legs and thick, leathery skin. I have noticed that when I treat

the venous insufficiency the skin texture, color and leathery appearance improve along with the systematic relief of night cramps, etc.

So, when are achy, painful legs associated with venous insufficiency? The answer isn't always straightforward. There are numerous other reasons for leg pain. The pain associated with venous insufficiency is rather unique. Patients often complain of a tired, heavy feeling at the end of the day after sitting or standing for a long period of time. Elevating the legs improves the pain by allowing gravity to assist in returning the blood to the heart. One usually always sees large, bulging veins or spider veins. The leg swelling doesn't usually show indents to pressure unlike other types of leg swelling.

Occasionally, the varicose or spider veins over a period of time erode through the skin causing profuse bleeding. If this happens, I suggest consulting a phlebologist (vein specialist) as soon as possible even if the bleeding stops.

Having venous insufficiency and varicose veins also is a risk factor for getting clots. Some types of clots can travel to the lungs and even cause death. So, it is advisable to let your surgeon or physician know if you have varicose veins or venous insufficiency so they can take appropriate means to try to prevent this from happening. They usually try special stockings and blood thinners prior to surgery.

Sitting and standing makes venous insufficiency worse. Walking and dorsiflexion of the feet (like pushing on a gas pedal) slow this disease. Compression stockings (medical grade) also help. The newer stockings are pretty, come in different colors and are easier to wear in warm weather. In summary, if you think you have venous insufficiency or varicose veins or would like to learn how to put compression stockings on or how to be measured for a pair, contact us for a free consultation.



Kamran Goudarzi, MD

Kamran Goudarzi, MD is one the nation's leaders and pioneers in the scarless treatment and elimination of varicose and spider veins. One of the first surgeons in the United States to achieve board certification by The American Board of Phlebology (the study of venous disease), Dr. Kamran has now performed thousands of successful procedures in the field. With extensive training in both the US and Great Britain, Dr. Kamran has remained on the forefront of the latest breakthroughs in the treatment of venous disease.