

Foam sclerotherapy varicose vein treatment

Introduction

Foam sclerotherapy is a procedure used to seal off varicose veins using ultrasound guidance. This leaflet explains what it entails, risks and aftercare advice.

What are varicose veins?

Varicose veins are a common disorder in the leg. Healthy leg veins have valves that open and shut to allow blood to flow upwards back to the heart. Varicose veins develop when these valves fail. This means that the valves do not close properly causing blood to hang in the veins under gravity.

This increases the pressure in the vein and causes:

- Varicose veins (raised large veins)
- Pain
- Swollen legs
- Heavy tired legs
- Changes to the skin on your legs
- Ulcers

If the varicose veins remain untreated, these symptoms can get worse over time.

What causes varicose veins?

There are many reasons why you may develop varicose veins. These include:

- Age
- Gender
- Family history
- Heavy lifting
- Pregnancy especially more than one pregnancy
- Being overweight
- Long periods of standing

What is foam sclerotherapy?

This treatment involves injecting special foam into your veins. The foam scars the veins, which seals them closed. This type of treatment may not be suitable if you've previously had deep vein thrombosis.

The injection is guided to the vein using an ultrasound scan. It's possible to treat more than one vein in the same session.

How can foam sclerotherapy help?

The veins are injected with foam which will seal them so they will shrink, helping to relieve the heaviness, aching, throbbing, itching and fatigue that varicose veins cause in the leg.

Where will I have this procedure?

This procedure will be carried out at West Berkshire Community Hospital in the operating theatre and will be done without anaesthetic.

What do I need to bring with me?

When you come to hospital please wear flat sensible footwear, and loose comfortable clothing for your safety and comfort. You may keep your underwear on for the procedure but will need to remove your lower garments; you will be given a gown to protect your dignity.

You may bring a book or other activity to keep you occupied while you are waiting. Please do not bring valuables into hospital.

What will happen in the hospital?

You will be seen by the surgeon who will explain the procedure to you. You will be asked to sign a consent form for treatment. If there is anything that you do not understand or would like to know more about please ask before signing the consent form.

You will be asked to change into a hospital gown to allow us to be able to get access to your legs to prevent your own clothes from getting soiled. Your surgeon may mark the veins to be treated with pen.

You will be called to theatre, and asked to lie on a trolley in the operating room. Your leg or legs if both are being treated will be painted with an antiseptic solution.

The surgeon will use an ultrasound probe to find the vein. If there is more than one vein to be treated they will do one at a time. The surgeon will insert a needle into the vein and the foam will then be injected into the vein, after elevating (lifting up) your leg. You may experience a sharp pain initially which will wear off.

What happens after the procedure?

A small plaster will be applied over the needle site. We will also fit you with an elasticated compression stocking. This will either be a long leg or below knee stocking, depending on which veins you have had treated.

You will need to wear this for three days and nights. It is important that you wear it continuously without taking it off, as it will help reduce swelling and help your leg to heal. You will not be able to have a bath or shower but may be able to have a wash with a flannel. You must make sure you do not get the stocking wet.

You will walk back to the Day Surgery Unit and can go home when you are able. The procedure takes about half an hour but may be longer if more than one vein is treated. Your doctor will normally recommend that you start to move around after the procedure to keep the blood flowing.

You can return to work the following day if you feel up to it. This will largely depend on whether your job is a strenuous one but you will most likely be able to return to work after two or three days at most.

We recommend that you keep mobile and avoid strenuous exercise or heavy lifting for 2 weeks.

It is safe to drive straight away.

What are the risks of having this procedure?

As with all medical procedures there are some risks involved. For this procedure there may be a risk of the following:

- Bruising along the line of the vein treated
- Tingling and numbness around the site
- Skin discoloration
- Phlebitis when the vein becomes inflamed, causing tenderness, lumpiness and red/purple discoloration
- Blood clots (rare)
- Ulceration
- Allergic reaction to the foam (rare)
- Chest tightness, dry cough (rare)
- Visual disturbances

If you have any of the following symptoms below speak to your GP immediately:

- Fever, raised temperature
- Breathlessness
- Hot and inflamed red leg

What are the alternatives to this treatment?

Wearing compression stockings/socks may improve symptoms.

What activities will I be able to do afterwards?

After the initial 2 week precautions mentioned above, there are no restrictions

Follow up

You will be sent an appointment for a follow up about 4 weeks after the procedure. Contact the Clinical Admin Team (CAT 3) if you haven't received an appointment letter by this time.

Useful numbers

Denise Hearfield / Tiina Winson, Vascular Nurse Specialists	0118 322 8627
CAT 3	0118 322 6890
Pre-op Assessment Unit	0118 322 6812

Useful website addresses

<http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ipg8/informationforpublic>

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Varicose-veins/Pages/Treatment.aspx>

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

Denise Alston, May 2019

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