

ULTRASOUND-GUIDED FOAM SCLEROTHERAPY FOR VARICOSE VEINS

Background

Injections have been used to treat varicose veins since the mid 19th century, usually using a detergent solution. This treatment became very popular in the 1960s and 1970s, but has declined over the last 10 years because of research showing that surgery was better than injections in most patients with varicose veins. However, several recent trials have studied a newer type of injection using a foam solution. The results are promising although may not be quite as good as surgery. The main advantage is that no general anaesthetic is needed and you can resume your normal activities very rapidly. Not all varicose veins can be treated in this way but your surgeon will advise which method is best for you. Only one leg can be treated at a time so you may need to come back to have the other leg dealt with.

Procedure

You will be asked to attend the Day Ward (Tavistock) where the surgeon will discuss the procedure with you and mark the veins that need to be treated. You will be asked to sign a consent form. The procedure is carried out in the operating theatre under sterile conditions. Local anaesthetic may be used to numb the main injection sites. The procedure is not painful although some patients do experience some aching in the leg for a few minutes. After the foam has been injected, the leg will be bandaged tightly. This is an important part of the treatment as it helps to keep the vein closed to prevent it refilling with blood. After the treatment is finished, please walk for about 15 minutes when you leave the treatment room. It is preferable for a relative or friend to drive you home after the procedure.

After the procedure

You will be able to resume your normal activity such as work or driving the following day, although you should avoid strenuous exercise for 72 hours. Some discomfort is expected after the third day or so. Simple painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen can be taken, or you could use an anti-inflammatory gel. The practice nurse at your GP's surgery will remove the bandages at 5 days; after this you should wear the white elastic stocking for a further 14 days during the day when you are up and about. Around one third of patients may need a second treatment to deal with any remaining veins. You will normally be given a follow-up outpatient appointment.

Are there any side effects or complications from this treatment?

Some tenderness, bruising, skin discolouration and lumpiness may occur for up to 3 months after the procedure. This is normal and will resolve. It means that the treatment has worked! Around one third of patients will have some darkening of the skin even 1 year after the procedure. Many thousands of patients have been treated with this technique. There is a very small risk of a deep vein thrombosis (5:1000), although this is less than with varicose vein surgery. If the leg becomes excessively painful, then you should contact your GP for advice. Some people have experienced temporary visual disturbances after treatment, but none has lasted for more than 2 hours. Some patients report a headache; normal painkillers can be used to deal with this. There have been reports of a stroke occurring after the procedure but this is rare. Further information from NICE is available (see attached).