



## Symptoms

Varicose veins may be entirely symptom free and cause no immediate health problems. However, when varicose veins are associated with CVI, the most common sign is ankle and foot swelling that progress up the lower leg. Other skin changes in the lower leg that commonly occur include discoloration, eczema, scarring or hard, thickened skin and ulceration.

When symptoms are present the most common are heaviness or fullness, aching, restlessness, tiredness, fatigue, pain, throbbing, burning, itching and muscle cramping. In advanced cases, breakdown of the skin may cause bleeding from varicose veins, and large varicosities may develop blood clots, a condition called superficial phlebitis or thrombophlebitis. If you experience any of these symptoms, talk with your doctor. Do not ignore these symptoms.

## Risk Factors

The most important factors leading to the development of chronic venous insufficiency and varicose veins include:

- Family history
- Increasing age over 30
- One or more blood clots in superficial or deep veins
- Female gender, although varicose veins occur nearly as commonly in men
- Multiple pregnancies
- Prolonged standing
- Heavy lifting

Limited physical activity, high blood pressure and obesity have also been linked with the presence of varicose veins in women.

## Diagnosis

CVI is primarily diagnosed by physical examination. The accuracy of physical examination can be further improved with the aid of a hand-held instrument called a Doppler. This allows the examiner to listen to the blood flow. The most accurate and detailed test, however, is a venous duplex ultrasound exam. This provides an ultrasound image or picture of the vein so that any blockage caused by blood clots or improper vein valve function can be detected. A CAT scan or MRI may be used to exclude other causes of leg swelling. These diagnostic tests are painless.

## Treatment

The treatment of CVI involves both medical and surgical treatments:

- Diet and lifestyle
- Avoid prolonged standing or sitting
- Elevate the feet above the thighs when sitting and above their heart when lying down three to four times a day if possible to reduce swelling
- Structured exercise such as walking to strengthen calf muscles may improve calf muscle function

## THE VASCULAR DISEASE FOUNDATION

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For more information, visit [vasculardisease.org](http://vasculardisease.org).

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