

Radiofrequency ablation of varicose veins under general anaesthetic

Procedure

The radio frequency procedure, trade name Venefit, formerly known as VNUS Closure is carried out in the operating theatre of the BMI Lincoln Hospital or St Hugh's Hospital Grimsby. You will be asked to attend before the list starts so that you can complete any necessary paperwork, to sign the final consent form and to have the correct side and the veins marked. As the procedure is under a general anaesthetic you must not eat and drink prior to the procedure. The exact time will be sent to you from the hospital or given to you if you have a pre assessment visit. You will be asked to change into a gown and you should bring a dressing gown and slippers with you to walk to the theatre.

On entering the theatre you will have your details checked one last time and be asked to lie on the couch. The anaesthetist, will insert a small cannula into a vein on the back of your hand. Mr Dunning will finally check the vein to be treated using the ultrasound scanner. The leg will be cleaned using an iodine solution and the leg covered in disposable fabric drapes. A special catheter is inserted into the vein to be treated through a needle. The catheter is then passed up the leg to the groin. The position of the catheter is checked by using an ultrasound machine. Very dilute local anaesthetic is then injected around the vein from knee to groin. The radio-frequency generator is attached to the catheter which is then slowly withdrawn down the vein. This causes the vein wall to heat to 120°C completely destroying the structure of the vein. The body heals by permanently scarring the length of the vein.

Any marked varicose veins may be removed through tiny incisions using a small hook. The stab incisions are closed with paper steristrips, covered with a dressing and crepe bandages applied to the leg.

The procedure usually takes between one and two hours, you will be able to go home once the effect of the anaesthetic have worn off and you have had something to eat and drink.

The following morning you may remove the crepe bandages and replace them with the support stocking supplied.

At home

You should be able to perform normal activities after 48 hours. Before then you will feel more comfortable if you sit with your feet elevated on a stool. Take several walks of any duration to avoid stiffness of the muscles and joints. Slight discomfort is normal. Occasionally, severe local twinges of pain may occur in some patients and may persist for some months. In the first week after the operation you may need to take a mild painkiller such as paracetamol to relieve discomfort.

You should wear the stocking during the day only for one week. You should not get the adhesive steristrips on your leg wet for the first seven days. Care will be needed when washing. You may remove the dressings and steristrips after one week. A good soak in the bath will make it easier.

Return to normal activity

You can return to work when you feel sufficiently well and comfortable, generally within a week. If you have had a large number of veins removed it may be longer before you are able to undertake most normal activities. If you have a job that involves much standing and your varicose veins were particularly severe, you may need longer off work. Mr Dunning will advise you and provide a certificate prior to your discharge.

The scars on your legs will continue to fade for many months. Do not get the wounds burnt in the sun as this fixes the scar and may prevent fading. A dab of sunblock over the wounds will prevent this.

Complications

These include

- Bleeding - many people will experience some bleeding from the small wounds, particularly if the varicose veins were large. Pressure applied to the bleeding will stop it on most occasions. You may wish to consider having some protection on your bed for the first night.
- Infection - this is rare but if it does occur can be treated with antibiotics.
- Neuralgia - This is discomfort or pain usually caused by a nerve being caught in scar tissue around the treated vein. It may occur after a few days and resolves after a few weeks as the scarring becomes softer. Rarely it can be severe and need special neuralgia pain killers to treat it.
- Venous thromboembolism - rarely deep venous thrombosis or pulmonary embolism (blood clot to the lung) can happen after this procedure
- Recurrence - the procedure is 93% successful at five years making it one of the best treatments for varicose veins. However you can develop new veins from different source.

Further information

Further information may be obtained from:

www.lincolnveinclinic.co.uk

<http://venefit.covidien.com>

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