Going home after your varicose veins surgery

This information sheet tells you about a number of things you can do to help you recover from the operation.

If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

When can I leave hospital?
If you have had your operation via the day surgery unit (DSU), you will be able to leave hospital on the same day as your operation. It is important that you rest for the remainder of the day to recover from the anaesthetic. You will need someone to help you home and stay with you for at least 24 hours after your surgery.

If you have had the surgery as an inpatient, your doctor or nurse will explain when you will be able to leave hospital.

What happens after the operation?
Most people describe the feeling in the leg as stinging or burning when they wake up from the operation. It is unusual for the leg to be painful. You are unlikely to feel sick, and you should be able to eat and drink again within a few hours.

Looking after my wound
A dressing will be placed on the cut in the groin and your leg will be bandaged up to the top of the thigh. Some of the smaller incisions may bleed a little over the first 24-48 hours. For this reason, it best to keep the leg covered with bandages for the first 48 hours. The incisions, although initially very visible, will subside to become virtually invisible within 9-12 months. There is usually extensive bruising in the leg, particularly down the inside of the thigh. This bruising usually lasts for 3-4 weeks.

With regards to the bandages, please follow this compression regime:

- Keep the bandages (the ones made of wool and crepe) on your leg for 48 hours.
- After 48 hours, remove the bandages and replace with TED stockings.
- Wear the TED stockings ONLY during the day for a further 12 days. It is not necessary to wear it at night.
- You can have a bath or shower after 48 hours which will loosen the adhesive strips. You can remove these strips now as it will be easier after a bath or shower.
- You should remove the TED stocking before entering the bath or shower.

Will I be in pain?
Most people describe the leg as sore and uncomfortable when they get home. These feelings increase steadily from the second day after your operation and are usually at their worst on the 8th to the 10th day. The discomfort usually resolves 12 to 14 days after the operation. You may need to take a mild painkiller such as paracetamol to relieve the discomfort in the first one to two weeks. Occasionally, the leg may become inflamed causing discomfort and lumpiness.
around the vein, (this is called phlebitis). This settles down within a month. Also, severe local
twinges of pain may occur in some patients and may persist for some months.

You will be sent home with a supply of some painkillers. You will be advised on their use
before you leave the hospital.

Will I need to do any specific exercises?
Regular daily exercise such as going for a walk (a few hundred yards three times a day will do,
but more if you wish) is recommended to avoid stiffness of the muscles and joints and provide
a gradual return to normal activity. Slight discomfort is normal.

To rest up after the operation raises the risk of developing blood clots in the deep veins (Deep
Vein Thrombosis or DVT). Regular exercise reduces this risk, but makes the leg more
uncomfortable.

When can I return to normal activities?
Return to normal activity as soon as possible when you get home. The more exercise you
take, the more sore your leg will be, but the quicker the leg will return to normal.

Swimming in public swimming baths should be avoided until all the wounds have healed.
There is no limit to other forms of exercise following your operation but be guided by how you
feel.

You can bath or shower 48 hours after the operation. Sometimes bathing or taking a shower
immediately after surgery may lead to bleeding from the smaller incisions.

You should be able to lift objects in the same way you did before your operation.

When can I return to work?
You can return to work when you feel sufficiently well and comfortable, generally about a week
to 14 days after your operation. If you have had both legs operated upon at the same time, and
you have a number of scars on each leg, it may take longer for you to recover.

If you have a job that involves much standing and your varicose veins were particularly severe,
you may need up to four to six weeks off work. Your GP will advise you about when it’s the
best time for you to return to work.

When can I drive?
We recommend that you do NOT drive for 48 hours after your operation as it could be
uncomfortable and your response time may be slower. However, there are no restrictions
published by the DVLA about driving after this sort of surgery, except to say that you must be
able to perform an emergency stop without pain. Check with your insurance company if
necessary. If in doubt, delay driving until you are happy.

Are there any complications I should be aware of?
- **Bleeding** – Sometimes a little ooze from the wound sites during the first 12 – 24 hours.
  This usually stops on its own. If necessary, press on the wound for 10 minutes. If
  bleeding continues after doing this twice, contact your GP or the hospital.
• **Wound infection** – Wounds sometimes get infected and this may need to be treated with antibiotics. This is not very common on varicose veins that are being treated for the first time and bad infections are rare. Occasionally, hard, tender lumps appear near the operation scars or in the line of the removed veins. These can appear even some weeks after operation and need not be a cause for concern. However, if they are accompanied by excess swelling, redness and severe pain, they may represent a wound infection and you should see your GP regarding this.

• **Fluid leak from the wound** – Occasionally, the groin incision may leak blood stained or clear fluid. Usually, this lasts a few days when it is blood stained. Sometimes, clear fluid collects under the groin incision. It may take up to six weeks to settle.

• **Nerve injuries** – Rarely, there is numbness around the wound or ankle. This is unavoidable due to the pulling on nerves during the operation. These are uncommon occurring in about 1 in 20 cases. The reduced sensation may be very noticeable at first but normally diminishes with time, and is not usually a problem in the longer term.

• **Deep Vein Thrombosis** – DVT complicates any operation from time to time. Patients with extensive varicose veins associated with skin changes are probably at the greatest risk, but the complication is rare.

• **Chest infections** – This can occur following this type of surgery, particularly in smokers, and may require treatment with antibiotics and physiotherapy.

**Important:** If you need urgent medical attention, please go to your local accident and emergency department (A&E).

**Will my varicose veins return?**
Recurrence of varicose veins occurs in about 1 in 15 patients over a 10 year period (or 5-30% at five years). Sometimes further treatment may be required.

You will have been warned that not every visible vein will disappear as a result of your operation and there is a chance that in the future, further varicose veins may develop, as you are clearly predisposed to them. The taking of regular exercise, the avoidance of becoming overweight, and the wearing of light support stockings will all help prevent you being troubled by varicose veins in the future.

**Will I have a follow-up appointment?**
In most instances, the surgeon will be happy for your follow-up to be done by your GP, unless otherwise indicated in exceptional circumstances. If this is required, you will be sent an appointment in the post.

**Appointments at King’s**
We have teamed up with King’s College Hospital in a partnership known as King’s Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at King’s. To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.
Contact us
If you have any questions or concerns about your varicose veins procedure, please contact the Vascular Nurse Specialist on 020 7188 0056 or 020 7188 2566 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline
If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)
To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust’s services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

NHS 111
Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

NHS Choices
Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

Language Support Services
If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

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