

# Going home after Radiofrequency Ablation and Foam Sclerotherapy for varicose veins

This leaflet explains more about returning to your everyday activities after your procedure.

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

## Your treatment

You have been treated with Radiofrequency Ablation (RFA) or Foam Sclerotherapy (FS), but sometimes both. Our aim is to provide you with a positive experience and one that is beneficial for your vascular need.

## What happens after your treatment

- Your leg will be bandaged from the foot to the top of the treated vein.
- We will check your blood pressure and bandages.
- You will be given your discharge letter.
- You will be given support stockings,
- You will be given a prescription for any painkillers that you need.
- You will be able to walk out of the hospital around half an hour after your procedure.
- We advise you not to drive home.

### The first day

The day after your procedure the local anaesthetic will have worn off so your bandaged leg will be a little more uncomfortable and will be slightly swollen.

You should take painkillers (paracetamol and / or ibuprofen) as prescribed for the first few days. Pain is unpredictable and varies a lot from patient to patient. **It is important that you follow the instructions on the packet.**

### The second day

The bandage should stay on for 24 hours after the procedure. You should then remove the bandage and gauze and wear the support stockings during the day.

You should remove the stockings to have a bath or shower and you do not need to wear them when you are in bed.

## The next two weeks

You should wear your support stockings during the day for the next two weeks.

The stockings may be uncomfortable and difficult to get on and off but it is important to get them on correctly in order to get the most benefit from them. They are supposed to be tight and you may need someone to help you put them on and take them off. You can try sliding your foot into a small plastic bag. Grasp the top of the stocking, slide the stocking over the plastic bag and up the leg, smoothing it out evenly, making sure that the stocking is not twisted or unduly stretched. Pull the plastic bag through the open toes to remove it. Pull the stockings all the way up so the correct level of compression is applied to each part of your leg.

Don't allow the stockings to roll down as they can form a tight band and dig into your skin. For the best results you should wear your stockings for the full two weeks but if they become uncomfortable and painful, you can stop wearing them.

Often it is a natural reaction to limp when your leg is bandaged and a bit sore however as your muscles, bones and joints are not affected by this procedure, we advise you to walk as normally as possible. Walking is important because it keeps blood flowing in the deep veins of your leg, and being inactive can increase your risk of Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT). **DVT is a blood clot that develops within a deep vein in the body, usually in the leg.** We recommend a minimum of three 20 minute walks each day after the procedure for two weeks.

Please do not throw away the stockings as you may need them later on if you get pain.

## Will I have pain?

Most patients recover from Radiofrequency Ablation and Foam Sclerotherapy without any problems. It is normal to feel a tightening sensation in your leg after a couple of days, which may last for a few days. It is also common to experience cramping, bruising and swelling. You should take your painkillers as prescribed.

## When can I return to normal activities?

You can carry out your normal day to day activities immediately after your treatment and do not need to avoid anything in particular. However you should avoid strenuous exercise for the first few days and then gradually build up the amount you do. Do not exert yourself initially and be guided by how well you feel.

## When can I return to work?

You can return to work when you feel well and comfortable. We usually advise taking between two days to one week off work, depending on the type of work you do. If your job involves prolonged standing, driving or if you've had both legs treated at the same time you may need to take longer off work.

Please check with your employer which sickness note they require. It is usually okay to self-certificate for up to seven days but if you are off work for a longer period you will need to see your GP for a certificate. We cannot supply certificates.

## When can I drive?

We advise that you do not drive for at least 48 hours after your procedure. You should only drive again when you are free of pain and able to perform an emergency stop comfortably. You should check with your insurance company to make sure you are covered to start driving again. If you are taking painkillers please check with a pharmacist whether it is safe for you to drive.

## How soon can I fly?

Sitting down for long periods with the knees bent, increases the risk of a DVT. You should avoid flying long haul (any flight over four hours long) for at least four weeks after your procedure.

## Are there any complications I should be aware of?

There are potential complications with any medical procedure, however only minimal complications have been reported with Radiofrequency Ablation and Foam Sclerotherapy. Some of the common problems are listed below.

### **Bruising**

Some bruising is normal and occasionally the leg will become very bruised. This may occur during the first few days following the procedure but will disappear after a few weeks. If you do experience bruising, walking or using an exercise bike can help reduce this.

### **Superficial thrombophlebitis**

Superficial thrombophlebitis are hard areas of blood clotting which feel like a lump and form in the treated veins. Most patients will experience some lumps and this is nothing to worry about although these lumps may be inflamed and uncomfortable. If this occurs, anti inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen will help. The lumps will eventually subside and disappear but it may take several months to do so.

Usually when there is inflammation, the leg will be painful and this pain may last for up to a month. Also severe twinges of pain may occur in some patients and may persist for some months, again you can take painkillers as prescribed.

Regular daily exercise such as walking, using an exercise bike or wearing your stockings for a few more days may help with the pain.

Although this may be uncomfortable try not to rest your leg as this increases the risk of developing blood clots in the deep veins (DVT).

### **Brown pigmentation of the skin**

This can occur following superficial thrombophlebitis. Usually it fades over time but can be permanent. It is common with Foam Sclerotherapy but can also occur with RFA.

### **Nerve injuries**

The nerves run close to the vein so can get damaged by the procedure. This may cause numbness, tingling and paraesthesia (pins and needles). This reduced sensation may be very noticeable at first but normally diminishes with time.

## **Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)**

This is a rare complication of any operation to the legs. To lower this risk the most important advice is to move around when you can and avoid long periods of not moving.

## **Recurrent veins**

No treatment for varicose veins can be completely guaranteed against it recurring. Some people can still grow new veins even when all previous veins have been treated correctly. Overall the risk of recurrence after these procedures is thought to be about 15 in 100 cases. So far these newer procedures seem to be better than the older surgical treatments.

Regular exercise, weight control, and wearing light support stockings can all help prevent you from being troubled by varicose veins in the future.

**It is important for you to understand that not every visible vein will disappear as a result of your treatment. Your treatment has been for symptoms, not overall appearance. There is usually the bonus of improved cosmetic result but this is not guaranteed nor is it the main reason for treatment.**

## **Will I have a follow up appointment?**

In most cases the consultant will be happy for your follow up to be done by your GP (doctor), unless there is a specific reason. If this is required you will be sent a letter by post.

## **Emergencies**

Please seek help immediately (call an ambulance or go to A+E) if the following occurs:

- You have difficulty breathing, which gets worse when you take a deep breath.
- You have a sudden cough, or you cough up blood.
- You have sudden chest pain.
- You have pain in your calf and you are not able to put your foot down.

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your varicose veins procedure, please contact the Vascular Nurse Specialist on 020 7188 0056 (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](http://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.

**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

### Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS)      **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints)      **e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

### Language Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

**t:** 020 7188 8815      **e:** [languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk)

### 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.

**t:** 111

### NHS Choices

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

**w:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, and to become a member:

**t:** 0800 731 0319      **e:** [members@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:members@gstt.nhs.uk)

**w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership)

**Leaflet number: 4294/VER1**

Date published: August 2016

Review date: August 2019

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