

# IT'S TIME FOR A HEART TO HEART...

## Information for reducing the risk of venous disease



**Who's at Risk?** Problems with the veins of the leg occur in both men and women of all ages but certain factors increase the risk of venous problems. Health conditions, lifestyles habits, heredity, injury, surgery, age, **occupation** (prolonged sitting or standing), and pregnancy all play a role.

In the U.S., it is estimated that approximately 1 out of 2 individuals suffers from a venous disorder, the most common of which is Varicose Veins.

Recent U.S. study indicates that venous disease in some form is present in over 90% of women over the age of 70 and 80% of men over the age of 70.



**Good Leg Health...** Three easy actions can help you maintain the health of your leg veins; ***Exercise, elevation, and wearing gradient compression hosiery.*** Regular walking, swimming or cycling works the calf and thigh muscles. Contraction of these muscles helps the return of venous blood from the legs back to the heart.



### **Travel...**

Long distance travel, whether by automobile, train, or airplane can be associated with leg discomforts and risks. Lack of leg movement gives way to swelling of the feet and legs. The swelling contributes to leg fatigue, discomfort and the sensation of leg heaviness.

Activity restriction in the confined seated position results in diminished flow of venous blood from the legs back to the heart. This combined with pre-existing risk factors may lead to a more serious danger – travel – related thrombus. A travel-related thrombus is a venous thrombosis (blood clot in a vein) associated with greater than 5 hours of travel in a seated position. The venous thrombosis may be limited to a deep vein (DVT) or a fragment could flow to the lungs and lodge causing a pulmonary embolism (PE).

The likelihood of a thrombus occurring can be reduced with appropriate preventative measures suited to an individual's risk. Risk factors for long-distance travel related venous thrombosis include: age over 40, malignancy, heart failure, varicose veins, chronic venous insufficiency (CVI), obesity, hormonal medication, previous DVT, family history of DVT, and recent surgery.

Recommendations for any extended travel:

- Drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids, especially water
- Perform ankle movements often
- Stretch and exercise you legs at least once every hour
- Elevate legs when possible
- Avoid high-heeled footwear and restrictive clothing
- Wear gradient compression hosiery
- Seek medical advice if you have or are concerned about any risk factors



## Pregnancy...

While much of the focus is on your baby, changes are also affecting your veins. The normal hormonal changes that occur with pregnancy affect the walls of your veins causing them to relax or dilate. Relaxation of the veins occurs in early pregnancy-during the first trimester. Total blood volume also increases in the first trimester and gradually rises with gestation. Your total blood volume may increase up to 45% in comparison to the non-pregnant level.

Vein relaxation, valve incompetence, and increased blood volume all contribute to reducing venous flow from your legs. The reduction in flow results in congestion. Venous congestion results in swelling and leg discomfort. Ankle swelling occurs with most pregnant women.

During the third trimester the weight of the baby and uterus may impede return of blood through the veins of your legs. Gradient compression stockings reduce venous congestion and support the veins in the legs. This helps manage the increase blood volume and relaxed vein walls thus reducing the amount of swelling and the severity of varicose veins.



## Gradient Compression...

Gradient compression delivers a squeezing to the leg that is tightest at the ankle. The degree of squeezing or compression gradually decreases up the leg. This compression, expressed in mmHg, provides two main benefits.

Compression is believed to increase the pressure in the tissues beneath the skin thus reducing excess leakage of fluid from the capillaries and increasing absorption of tissues fluid by the capillaries and lymphatic vessels. Compression therefore reduces and helps prevent swelling.

The physical presence of the stocking also helps control the size (diameter) of veins beneath the stocking. The stocking does not allow these superficial veins to over expand with blood. This action helps prevent "pooling". The venous blood then flows more quickly up the leg towards the heart.



Most major insurance plans cover gradient compression hosiery with very little or no additional out-of-pocket expense.



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