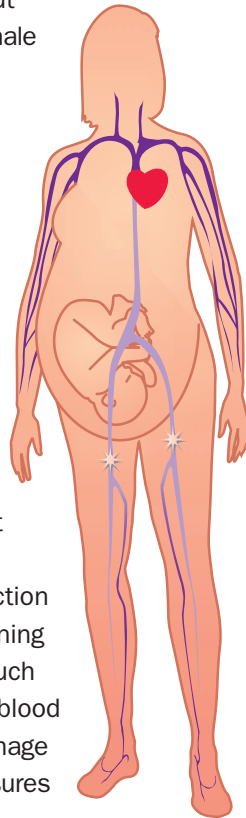


Pregnancy causes an amazing, but stressful, transformation in the female body. Blood flow is dramatically affected during this period due to the added demands of the fetus. In fact, the volume of blood in a woman's body almost doubles. Hormones, which add elasticity to the body during this time, also weaken and stretch the veins.

As you know, the **arteries** carry oxygen-rich blood to the extremities of the body; their thick walls actually help the heart "pump" the blood by contracting during each heartbeat. **Veins** function as "one-way" thoroughfares returning blood to the heart. Veins have much thinner walls; these less-durable blood vessels can suffer irreparable damage when subjected to the added pressures of pregnancy.

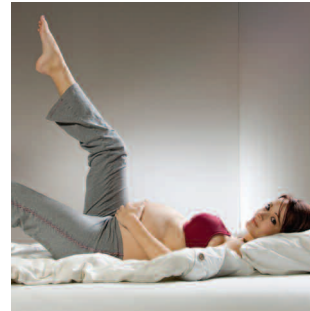
With each heartbeat, the veins open to allow blood to flow towards the heart. Between heartbeats, the depleted blood is kept from flowing backwards by thousands of tiny "valves" lining the veins.

The additional blood pressure from pregnancy can cause permanent damage to the valves and vein walls, thus allowing blood to flow backwards (pulled down by gravity) and pool in the lower extremities. This is what causes swelling and that tired, aching feeling in your legs – and the reason why circulatory problems are most prominent in the ankles and lower legs.



Vein Problems

Veins may return to normal after a baby is born. Frequently, however, the vein walls are permanently stretched and damaged. For many women, the vein damage during pregnancy is apparent. Damaged veins that are twisted and stretched are referred to as **varicose veins**. Smaller veins closer to the surface of the leg that show damage are called **spider veins**.



Vein damage caused during pregnancy can be more than just a cosmetic problem. Mild discomfort caused by a continued pressure on weakened vein walls can be a signal that deeper, more serious problems are developing. An important fact to remember is that once damaged, veins cannot repair themselves. They can only be protected, or they will become more damaged over time.

Other factors that can contribute to vein problems are:

- Heredity
- Excess weight
- Occupational causes (such as excessive standing)
- Previous damage or inflammation of the vein system

In most cases, your personal risk of "vein disease" is determined by a combination of these factors. For that reason, it's nearly impossible to predict with certainty how each person will be affected.

Elevate Your Legs When Resting

Raising your legs above your heart gives your veins a well-deserved break by allowing gravity to assist in returning blood.

Avoid Standing for Extended Periods

Remember, gravity pulls blood downward when standing, putting extra pressure on veins.

Ask Your Doctor About Mild Leg Exercise

Mild exercise utilizes your legs' muscles as a "muscle pump," assisting the veins in pushing blood back towards the heart.

Avoid Tight-Fitting Clothing

The goal is to avoid anything that might impede the flow of blood in your body.

Don't Sit for Extended Periods of Time

Long periods of inactivity, like car or plane trips, can cause blood to pool in the lower extremities. If you travel, get up and walk around every so often.

Massage Your Legs at the End of the Day

This produces many of the same benefits as mild exercise by assisting in blood circulation.

Wear Graduated Compression Stockings

Mediven graduated compression maternity stockings are specially designed to help leg veins maintain their resiliency during the added pressures of pregnancy. These stockings offer sheer, comfortable and precise support for each part of your leg. They're usually covered by insurance. Ask your doctor about this important option.

Leg health problems and vein disease affect approximately 80 million Americans. Most of us believe vein disease and leg health problems are unavoidable consequences of aging. While this may be true for many, women should know that the actual cause of most women's leg problems that occur in later life are rooted in the bodily change that happened many years earlier: pregnancy.

There is more to vein problems than meets the eye. Up to 20% of women develop visible varicose veins during pregnancy. However, hidden vein damage can occur during pregnancy without any visible signs; it can lie undiagnosed for many years until the normal aging process allows previously weakened veins to develop into serious problems later in life.

The enclosed information will give you a quick overview of the potential leg health problems brought on by pregnancy and provide tips for pregnant women that will help minimize future leg health problems.

*The key to remember is this: **Serious leg health practices now can prevent serious problems later.***

About Medi

Medi has been a leader in the phlebology, prosthetic, and orthopedic products industry throughout its 80-year history. Dedicated to superior product development, conscientious quality control and total customer satisfaction, Medi has forged an unmatched reputation for innovative products, uncompromising quality and dedicated customer support.

Contact your local leg health specialist for more information:



For additional information on other Medi products or leg health issues, or to subscribe to our FREE Leg Health Newsletter go to www.mediusa.com.



Straight Talk
Pregnancy & Your Leg Health