

# Unusual Vein Symptoms

by John P. Landi, MD

**Phlebology** is defined as the treatment of veins.

Over the last eight years the treatment of the Venous System has evolved into its own specialty and has its own certifying board, called The American Board of Phlebology. There are currently less than three hundred physicians internationally certified by The American Board of Phlebology. Years ago the only treatment for varicose veins was a procedure called "Stripping" of the veins which involved multiple incisions and stitches and, in effect, resulted in the trading of a vein for a scar. Also, the treatment for spider veins was only by injecting a saline solution and this was called "Sclerotherapy". This saline solution had many side effects including brownish discoloration, pain with injections, phlebitis and even ulcerations of the skin. Over this last eight year period the state-of-the-art treatment of veins now is Vein Closure either with a laser or a Radio Frequency Filament and Sclerotherapy of the veins usually with a foam solution or with a glycerin solution.

The usual vein symptoms consist of aching, cramping, burning and swelling of the legs, as well as the physical findings of varicose and spider veins. Usually associated with vein symptoms is a strong family history of vein

problems and, in women, prior pregnancies frequently lead to either varicose or spider veins. The underlying mechanism involved with both spider and varicose veins is something called valvular insufficiency. What this means is that the valves in the veins which carry the blood from the feet up towards the heart fail to close properly. In doing so the blood does not go through the valves as it should and goes around the malfunctioning valves through the skin in the form of the spider and varicose veins. This could only be adequately diagnosed by a noninvasive ultrasound test.

Unusual vein symptoms consist of brownish discoloration of the legs, restless legs, ulcerations around the ankles and occasionally burning of the legs. Brownish discoloration of the legs is something that occurs chronically over time. It is usually related to an underlying vein valve closure problem. We technically call this "Reflux". Reflux means that blood instead of going from the feet up towards the heart goes in the reverse direction back towards the feet. Since the blood flow is going in a reversal of flow, this ultimately leads to something called venous hypertension (high blood pressure in the veins) which leads to the venous blood leaking out of the veins and

causing discoloration of the skin. This discoloration becomes brown in color and leads to a thickened weakened skin. This skin is prone to ulceration, infection, cellulitis, itching and even a chronic condition called lymphedema.

## The second unusual vein symptom is leg swelling.

Varicose veins in general will not cause vein swelling. However, advanced cases of varicose veins and advanced cases of chronic insufficiency of the valves will lead to chronic swelling of the legs. Oftentimes patients present with a heaviness and increase in size of the legs especially around the calf and ankles. Again, the diagnosis is usually made based on an ultrasound which shows valvular insufficiency.

The third uncommon symptom associated with valvular insufficiency and chronic vein problems is the restless leg syndrome. It is noteworthy, that if one watches T.V. and sees the multiple ads for medications to prevent restless leg syndromes, none of these ads recommend obtaining a venous ultrasound or vein therapy as the treatment for restless leg syndrome. Instead they rec-

ommend expensive medications which are fraught with multiple complications. Oftentimes restless leg syndromes are due to valvular insufficiency and result in chronic venous stasis which leads to the back up of venous blood and venous hypertension.

The fourth uncommon symptom related to chronic venous stasis and insufficiency is the most dreaded complication of all venous disease and that is an ulceration that forms usually around the ankle area. This could be either on the inside or outside of the ankle but most commonly on the inside. This ulceration is due to weakening of the skin from the backup of the venous blood and the long standing venous hypertension. Ultimately, the skin weakens, breaks down and ulcerates. It is very difficult to heal these ulcerations and they are prone to become infected.



**T**he unusual symptoms of venous insufficiency are not commonly recognized by the average non medical person. All of these can be diagnosed by a well done venous ultrasound which should be performed by a Registered Vascular Technician who is specifically trained to do the test and look for these unusual abnormalities. The test should also be interpreted by a person certified to interpret the ultrasonic examination. A physician can obtain a certification called RPVI (Registered Physician Vascular Interpretation) indicating that he is well qualified to interpret the ultrasounds. There are many physicians who have obtained both their RVT and/or their RPVI. These credentials should be looked for when one is having their ultrasound interpreted. As far as diagnosis of the unusual symptoms of venous disease i.e., swelling, brownish discoloration, leg ulcerations and burning, these can be diagnosed by an ultrasound which will look at the superficial venous system, the deep venous system and the connecting or perforating venous system. Any one or all of three could be defective leading to venous reflux and insufficiency and ultimately chronic venous insufficiency. The treatment of these problems is based on the ultrasonic findings and most commonly valvular reflux and insufficiency is found and the offending leaking valves can be sealed by either a laser or a radio frequency procedure thus eliminating the need for an operation, surgical incisions and suturing. This is usually done in the office or out-patient setting.

Dr. John P. Landi is a Board Certified General Surgeon and Fellowship Trained Vascular Surgeon who has been treating veins since 1980. Over the last eight years he has developed the Vanish Vein & Laser Center which is a state-of-the-art Vein Treatment Center dedicated to the eradication of veins. He is one of less than 300 physicians internationally certified by The American Board of Phlebology. He is also certified by The American Registry for Diagnostic Medical Sonography as an RPVI (Registered Physician Vascular Interpretation) and he has performed over 7500 hundred Laser and Radio Frequency Vein Closure Procedures. He also has extensively treated spider veins with multiple modalities including foam sclerotherapy and glycerin sclerotherapy.

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