VENOUS INSUFFICIENCY

What is it?
The veins return blood back to the heart, and valves in the veins stop the blood from flowing backwards. When your veins are not functioning properly, blood has a difficult time returning from your limbs back to the heart. This is known as venous insufficiency and blood tends to pool in the veins in your legs.

How is it caused?
Several factors cause venous insufficiency, including genetics, obesity, gravity, blood clots and trauma. However it’s most commonly caused by varicose veins.

Who is at risk?
The veins return blood back to the heart, and valves in the veins help prevent blood from flowing backwards. With varicose veins, the valves are often dysfunctional, and blood leaks back through the damaged valves. Venous insufficiency is more common in women than in men. It’s also more likely to occur in adults over the age of 50.

What are the symptoms?
Signs and symptoms of venous insufficiency include swelling of the legs or ankles, pain that worsens when you stand, leg cramps, aching, throbbing, or a feeling of heaviness in your legs, itchy legs, skin that is changing color, especially around the ankles, leg ulcers and varicose veins.

How is it diagnosed?
Your doctor will want to do a physical examination and take a complete medical history to figure out if you have venous insufficiency. They may also order some imaging tests to pinpoint the source of the problem. These tests may include a duplex ultrasound which assesses the direction of blood flow.

How is it treated?
The most common treatment for venous insufficiency is the use of compression stockings. These elastic stockings apply pressure and improve the return of blood. In addition, exercises, weight loss, avoiding tobacco use and leg elevation are recommended. Sometimes venous insufficiency requires minimally invasive surgery and may include thermal ablation, non-thermal ablation sclerotherapy, or phlebectomies.

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