



# LOVING YOUR LEGS THIS VALENTINE'S DAY



**Mr Sudip Ray, a vascular specialist in Kingston and Wimbledon, tells us how to look after our varicose veins this spring**



## **Why do varicose veins sometimes get worse during the wintertime?**

We avoid outdoor activity during the winter, and most workers spend an average of 30 minutes more at their desks each day rather than taking a break outside. Unfortunately prolonged sitting allows blood to pool inside our legs, causing damage to the lining of the veins, and may lead to the worsening of varicose problems such as aching, heaviness, restless legs or skin irritation.

## **What about standing still for long periods?**

This is particularly bad for leg veins as they become exposed to high gravitational pressure, and is a cause of occupational varicose disease in surgeons and nurses. Going for a short, brisk walk reduces this harmful pressure by up to 80%, and elevating the legs reverses it entirely.

**Are there other reasons why vein disease worsens over the New Year?** We tend to put on weight over Christmas and this adds more

pressure to the leg veins, as does standing up during long office parties. Wearing 3-inch stilettos also reduces leg vein flow by 20%, so barefoot dancing is back in fashion!

## **How can we improve our vein function?**

Regular exercise keeps vein pressure low and burns off those extra calories. 150 minutes of brisk walking or cycling each week is the recommended target, and if it's cold outside the veins may shrink too.

Elevating your legs to horizontal or higher for 15 minutes 2-3 times per day will help relieve the symptoms of varicose veins.

Wear fitted compression stockings or tights when sitting or standing for long periods. During the winter they won't stand out and should also keep you warm.

Enjoy your Valentine. There is evidence of a deficiency of oxytocin, also known as the "cuddle-hormone", in varicose veins, so perhaps spreading the love is good for both heart and legs!

## **When should one consider getting rid of varicose veins?**

If the measures above don't relieve your symptoms then it may be better to have them permanently sealed by VenaSeal "superglue" closure or radiofrequency ablation. Recovery is normally quick and treatment in the New Year allows ample time for the best cosmetic result when the sun returns.



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