

Endovenous Laser Treatment (EVLT)

Day Surgery Unit



Patient information leaflet

What is Endovenous Laser Treatment (EVLT)?

Endovenous laser therapy is a treatment for varicose veins which seals the vein from the inside. Under local anaesthetic (which numbs the vein and surrounding tissue), a small cut is made to allow a laser fibre to be inserted into the vein. It is slowly withdrawn to treat the affected vein. The purpose of endovenous laser therapy is to treat the symptoms caused by varicose veins such as pain or discomfort. The benefits of treatment to your varicose veins include easing your symptoms, possible improved cosmetic appearance and a reduction in complications associated with varicose veins such as swelling or skin discolouration.

What are the potential risks and complications?

Excessive bleeding and/or swelling: Elevate the limb and apply direct pressure to the area. If you are concerned, telephone the Day Surgery Unit or GP.

Redness: any red flares, streaks of the leg. Hotness, worsening tenderness or surrounding swelling might show that you are developing an infection. Please contact the unit or your GP.

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT): If you experience sudden swelling, pain (that may be made worse by bending the foot upwards towards the knee), tenderness and redness especially at the back of the leg below the knee you may have developed a DVT. Contact your GP immediately.

What are the alternatives?

Before being referred for surgery, your GP may have already tried 6 months of self care at home. This may have included using compression stockings, taking regular exercise and avoiding standing for long periods. However these treatments are not necessarily suitable in every case.

What can I expect after my operation?

Following the procedure you will experience some discomfort for the first few days. It is also possible that you will experience the following symptoms. These are all normal effects of your surgery. It is important to remember that your leg will continue to improve over the following three to six months and beyond.

Bruising – due to the nature of your surgery it is normal to experience some bruising. The degree of bruising will depend upon how extensive your varicose veins were in the first place.

Bruising should disappear over time but this may take up to 4 weeks after your operation.

Swelling – Swelling around your ankle is normal and is a common effect of all lower limb surgery. The drainage system called the lymphatic system is often affected in people who have varicose veins. Vein surgery can overwhelm this system for a few weeks to months, causing ankle swelling.

It is quite normal for the skin to feel swollen and hard in places during the first few days (and occasionally weeks) after the operation. This is part of the healing process and is caused by inflamed tissue and fluid.

Lumpiness – You may feel areas of lumpiness. These lumps are small collections of blood within the spaces where your varicose veins used to be. These lumps may feel hard and sometimes tender for a few weeks, however by three months they will largely be resolved and you can expect them to be completely gone by six months.

Numbness – Patchy loss of sensation in the leg is quite normal after varicose vein surgery to the proximity of nerves to the veins. All of the techniques used to burn, close or remove the veins have the potential to damage these nerves either temporarily or permanently.

Although most people will experience numbness for a few days (due to anaesthetic), some will continue to have numbness or altered sensation in areas on their leg or feet for up to six months or a year. Only one in 100 people have permanent numbness affecting part of their leg or foot.

Tightness – As part of the scarring process it is normal to experience a ‘tightening’ sensation. When the vein is closed, the scarring process that shrinks away the damaged area pulls upon the normal tissue. This is commonly felt from the groin to the knee although it can affect other areas. The sensation becomes less noticeable as the scar softens (about six weeks) and is almost always gone by three months.

Stockings

You will be given graduated pressure stockings to wear after your procedure. You must wear these for a minimum of seven days and nights after your procedure (depending on what procedure you have had).

Many people find benefit in wearing the graduated pressure stockings for several weeks after their surgery. If you find them a relief wear them!

Steristrip dressings

The wounds on your leg are small. We therefore use paper stitches called “steristrips”. These adhere to the skin and can be pulled off after three days. You do not need to soak them off – they usually come off more easily when dry.

If you find threadlike wisps coming out of any of your wounds do not pull them. These are tiny bits of tissue that have dried up on the surface. They will drop off or alternatively you can cut them off with small, sharp, clean scissors.

Bathing

Usually on the second morning you can take off your stockings, remove the steristrips (paper stitches) and have a brief shower. However, avoid soaking the wounds at this stage to minimise the risk of infection. After a week the wounds should be sufficiently healed to allow you to bath or shower as normal.

Work and activity

You will be able to walk around immediately after your surgery. It is anticipated that you will be able to return to work the following day if comfortable, however you may feel you require a few days off work particularly if your job is manual. Avoid standing still. If you must stand on the spot, keep your legs moving to ensure good circulation.

Try to go about your daily activities as normally as possible. Try to incorporate short frequent walks into your daily routine as this will help blood circulation and aid your healing by reducing the risk of swelling and deep vein thrombosis (DVT – a clot that can form in the leg and obstruct blood flow). If you sit down put your feet up as this will help reduce aching and swelling.

Will I be able to drive?

You must be fully mobile and comfortable, and able to do an emergency stop comfortably and safely, before driving again.

What about flying?

As you will be mobile immediately after your surgery you will probably be at very low risk of deep vein thrombosis. However after any surgery, the blood is a little more sticky than usual and so it is sensible not to plan any short flights within the first week or two after surgery and any long flights for four to six weeks.

Will I need a follow up appointment?

It is not usually necessary to see the surgeons following your surgery. However if a follow up appointment is required, this will be arranged and sent through the post to you.

Reference source

- www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Varicose-veins

Contact details

If you require further advice, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Day Surgery Unit

Telephone: 01483 406783 (Monday–Friday, 8am–6pm)

Surgical Short Stay Unit

Telephone: 01483 406828

Out of hours advice

Telephone: Call 111 (formerly NHS Direct)

Website: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

Telephone: 01483 402757

Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net

Opening hours: 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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