

VEIN HEALTH

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Q&A on Vein Symptoms

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Why do my legs itch? Could it be my veins?

Yes, dilated leaky veins can make your legs itch. The skin that lies over leaky veins can itch. Over time the itching can become dry red flaky skin. If left untreated, the skin will break down and develop ulcers (wounds that heal very slowly).

What are leaky veins?

The medical term for dilated leaky veins is venous insufficiency or chronic venous disease. When we sit or stand, the veins in our legs must defy gravity. Blood must flow from our foot to our heart. Several mechanisms help our blood defy gravity when we are upright. The two most important are our calf muscles and valves. When we walk or move our foot, the contractions in our calf muscles push blood towards the heart. In addition, our veins have valves to make sure blood goes in one direction. As we age, our calf muscles become weak and don't work as well. Also, veins can dilate and valves fail. When this happens, it is a down spiraling circle. One valve fails, the vein dilates more, then, more and more valves fail. Soon there are long sections of deep and superficial veins that reflux or allow blood to flow in the wrong direction.

How do leaky veins make my leg itch?

When veins dilate, small amounts of blood leak out of the vein. The blood in veins is lower in oxygen. This blood "leaks" into the skin and is irritating. The irritation is often felt as itching. It is very common for itchy skin to lie directly over big leaky veins or high pressure veins.

What causes leaky veins?

The most common cause of bad veins is genetics. If one parent has bad veins there is a 70% chance the children will have bad veins. If both parents have bad veins there is a 90% chance the children will have bad veins.

Therefore, many people have a strong familial cause for the veins to stretch, dilate and not work right. Other causes include deep vein clots, any leg trauma, advancing age, jobs that require prolonged sitting or standing, obesity, sedentary life style and in women, pregnancy.

What are other symptoms of leaky veins?

The symptoms of leaky veins often are subtle when they first start. The symptoms include but are not limited to: leg aching, pain, heaviness, fatigue, cramps, restlessness, swelling, itching, red dry lower legs, burning, and ulcers. Some people will have spider veins or varicose veins on their legs as well. The symptoms tend to be worse with standing, sitting and at the end of the day. Over time, the symptoms get worse and more frequent. It can happen gradually enough that you forget what "normal" feels like.

I think I have leaky veins. What can I do to treat my leaky veins?

Come in for a consultation and ultrasound (imaging test to diagnose leaky veins) to determine if you have leaky veins. Temporary improvement in symptoms can be found with compression stockings, walking, moving the foot, elevating the legs, cooling the legs, wraps, exercise, ibuprofen or Tylenol. More permanent solutions to leaky veins include closing the veins with heat or medicine.

For additional information on Chronic Venous Disease and its treatments, please visit: www.rockymountainveinclinic.com.

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