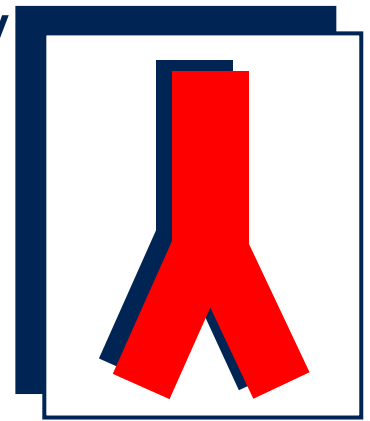


Will Butcher – Vascular Surgery

Patient information

Information to help you understand Foam Injection Sclerotherapy for Varicose veins



There are three treatments for varicose veins in the modern age:

- Surgery
- Endovenous therapy
- Injection Sclerotherapy

This information sheet is about Injection sclerotherapy

INJECTION SCLEROTHERAPY

We have been injecting veins for more than 50 years. This has enjoyed periods of popularity and period where it was not used much at all. Lately we have found that if you inject the veins with foam it seems to work better than the old type of injections.

What exactly does the procedure involve?

The procedure is undertaken in the rooms as it is very safe. A scan of the affected leg is usually performed first. Once I know what needs to be done, I will insert a few needles into the veins to be treated. While this is done you are usually standing or sitting. These injections can be a little sore but are not usually too bad. Once this is done we will get you to lie down, and the Foam is injected into the veins using the scanner to guide it. A compression stocking is then applied. The procedure generally takes between 10 and 20 minutes depending on what is required.

The procedure is usually only mildly painful, inserting the needles may be a little disconcerting for some people but most manage very well, even some quite squeamish patients. The injections themselves are not painful but the vein may go into spasm immediately after the injection which can cause a cramp like pain in the leg. This is usually short lived. During the procedure I may ask you to stand or lie or change position to make it easier to get to some veins. Most patients who have had surgery previously are very impressed at how easy it is and pain-free.

In order to limit the amount of the sclerotherapy medication we use at any one time, we will only usually inject one leg at a time.

How does it work?

The Foam is not like cement, it does not solidify. Instead by sticking to the inner lining of the veins for a while it damages the lining which then becomes very sick. Blood will then not flow in the veins, and it clots. As the clot absorbs the veins hopefully seal shut. If they do not then further injections may be necessary. Other treatments may still be a possibility if this does not work.

COMPLICATIONS

What WILL happen?

After the veins are injected they will fill with blood clot and become lumpy and uncomfortable. This is usually worst on the third or fourth day. Some people can find this very uncomfortable but most find it no more than mild pain or discomfort.

Quite often (but not inevitably) there will be some staining on the skin around where the veins were injected. This unfortunately can last for several months and in some may not ever go completely (though this is rare).

What MIGHT Happen?

There may be a little bruising.

DVT – a clot in the deep veins, this is very rare but may very occasionally occur.

Some patients may have a bit of a red reaction to the stocking.

Some patients develop a cough or mild chest pain after the injections due to the foam getting into the lungs. This is normal, the foam is supposed to end up in the lungs eventually and from there it is easily removed by the body.

Some patient may get some visual changes and a funny taste in the mouth, these are both temporary.

Sometimes in patients with big veins the injection can cause a little sore at the site of the injection. This usually heals up within a month or so.

In some patients if the veins are very sore in the first couple of weeks we can remove a little of the clotted blood from the vein to make it a bit easier. If the veins are very sore you should phone up and come in to see us.

What RARELY happens?

Very occasionally incidents where some of the foam has gone into the brain (through an undiagnosed hole in the heart). If this occurs you may have a mini stroke. It is usually very brief (15 minutes or so) and recovery complete.

A very small group of patients may have an allergic reaction to the medicine we inject.

After the procedure:

In the beginning you will have a stocking on your leg. This should be worn day and night for five days only removing it to shower. The stocking should then be worn during the day for a further five weeks. If the veins are very tender, wearing the stocking for longer than this may help with the pain.

The lumpiness takes between 3 and 8 months to go away. This is related to the size of the veins in the first place. During this time the veins will be a little tender especially when you are up and about. Usually this settles down very well.

Pain killers

Most patients need no painkillers at all but some find they do need some. If this is the case, take 2 paracetamol tablets every 6 hours for the first few days.

Follow up

I generally see most patients within 6 weeks of their injections. Not everyone will have to come though especially those with small or minor veins. Unfortunately, I can not usually treat both legs at once (if both are affected) so some people will come back and see me to have the other side done.

More information

The first sensible step is to discuss your problem with your GP or surgeon, they will be best positioned to explain what to expect.

If you need more information you can go to one of these vascular organisation's websites:

The Australia and New Zealand Society for Vascular Surgery.

www.anzsvs.org.au/patientinformation/

The Vascular Surgical Society for Great Britain and Ireland.

www.vascularsociety.org.uk/patients/