

ULTRASOUND GUIDED FOAM SCLEROTHERAPY

What can be treated?

This technique can be used to manage large varicose veins. The method can be used alone or in conjunction with the thermal ablation methods, RF ablation and laser ablation. Some patients have undergone many previous treatments for varicose veins but have not achieved a satisfactory result. Skilled ultrasound guided injection of the remaining veins leads to an excellent outcome in such cases.

What cannot be treated?

Very large, extensive varices may be treated by surgery. Small varicose veins less than 3 mm in diameter and thread veins are best treated by microsclerotherapy using a standard sclerosing solution.

How is this treatment given?

Foam sclerotherapy is performed in the consulting room with the help of an injection of local anaesthetic. This treatment causes very minor discomfort in most people and is complete in 20-30 minutes. The aim is to inject and destroy the main surface vein which is causing the varicose veins. The great saphenous vein is injected above and below the knee and the small saphenous on the back of the calf. Several fine plastic tubes are placed within the vein with the help of ultrasound imaging. The leg being treated is elevated to empty all the surface veins. The foam is prepared and injected into the vein. The foam rapidly spreads along the vein and is followed using the ultrasound machine. Injection of foam continues as the foam spreads into the varicose veins. Usually 4 – 8 injections of foam are needed altogether. Foam is painless to inject.

What does the injection feel like?

The injection is not painful and normally causes no unusual feelings in the leg, although aching may be felt for a few minutes after the treatment. Paracetamol or Nurofen may be taken for any remaining discomfort.

Compression regime.

Following foam injections, we apply a firm bandage and compression stocking to the leg. The bandage can be removed after 5-7 days. You may do this yourself, it is easy to do. Just

take off the stocking and cut along the front of the bandage from top to bottom. You should see a large improvement in the appearance of your leg. A strong elastic stocking should be worn during the day for a further 4-7 days.

Effects of treatment.

Most patients are able to leave the clinic immediately after treatment. A few people experience a cough or tightness in the chest. Migraine sufferers sometimes experience the visual disturbance that occurs before a migraine attack. All of these symptoms resolve within 20 – 30 mins.

What is it like after the injections?

Immediately after the injection treatment patients are able to walk normally and continue their work. No special exercise need be taken. It is not necessary to rest. We suggest that long haul air travel (over 4 hours) is avoided whilst the bandages are in place, but other journeys can be continued as normal. Once the bandages have been removed long haul air travel is acceptable providing elastic compression stockings are worn. Vigorous exercise should be avoided for the first week. The leg may ache initially, and this continues for 2 – 4 weeks, but is not troublesome. Some patients need to take simple pain killers for this.

Further sessions.

We like to check that the treatment has worked and treat any remaining varicose veins one or two weeks following the main treatment. You will be given an appointment for this. We normally treat one leg at a time. Therefore, if varicose veins affect both legs further treatment to the other leg is given at the second visit followed by a check two weeks later. For one leg, two sessions are needed, and for both legs three sessions.

What happens next?

Large varicose veins are eliminated following this treatment. Bruising is commonly seen but resolves in about 8-12 weeks. Sometimes veins appear to turn into lumps and can still be felt beneath the skin. They are not usually visible from the surface. Trapped blood in these veins is removed with a needle. Any remaining lumps will slowly resolve over 3 – 6 months. Often pale brown discoloration appears where large veins have been injected. This also gradually resolves over 3 – 6 months.

Occasionally a varicose vein becomes a painful lump following this treatment. This is called 'thrombophlebitis' and can be treated under local anaesthetic by inserting a needle and removing trapped blood from the vein causing the problem. Otherwise this will usually settle without treatment over about 2 weeks. Rarely it may last a few weeks. This is a feature of treatment by sclerotherapy and is not hazardous in any way.

Rarely thrombosis may spread to the deep veins following injections of any type for varicose veins. If the leg swells, becomes painful or suffers cramps you should contact the office immediately for advice and a consultation. You should contact this office for advice should any other matter arise in connection with your treatment.

This treatment may result in the development of thread veins in the region of treatment in susceptible people. These may be treated by microsclerotherapy, if necessary. A very rare complication is accidental injection of an artery which may lead to severe and extensive damage to the tissues of the leg leading to ulceration of the skin. Further extremely rare complications include damage to sensory nerves, heart attack and stroke.

Follow-up

It is essential that you return after 6 months so that we can assess the final outcome and treat any residual veins. Please bring compression stockings to this appointment in case further injections are required.

Following the course of treatment 90% of patients are free of varicose veins for 5 years, but recurrence of varicose veins occurs in some people, even with the best treatment.

Advantages of foam sclerotherapy.

- Avoids the need for hospital admission, surgery and general anaesthesia.
- Results in minor discomfort during treatment and only minimal bruising compared to surgery.
- All treatment is performed as an outpatient and little or no time is required off work.
- Much less expensive than laser treatment or varicose vein surgery.

Disadvantages of foam sclerotherapy.

- Usually only one leg is treated per appointment.
- A few months are required for final outcome to be obtained with resolution of all bruising and lumps.
- May produce thread veins in some people. (These may also appear following laser or surgical treatment for varicose veins.)
- Further varicose veins sometimes appear after a period of months or years.

NICE and the MHRA (medicines licensing)

NICE has considered and approved Foam Sclerotherapy for use in the NHS. Foam Sclerotherapy has been widely used in many centres and is recognised as an appropriate method of managing varicose veins. The safety and efficacy of this treatment has been established by extensive research.

The MHRA has confirmed the safety of this treatment and licensed the drug Fibrovein® for use in Foam Sclerotherapy in the UK.

Insurance companies

Foam Sclerotherapy is recognised by medical insurance companies for the treatment of symptomatic varicose veins. Patients should contact their insurers to establish their eligibility for benefit under the terms of their insurance before treatment commences. For further information and appointments please contact:

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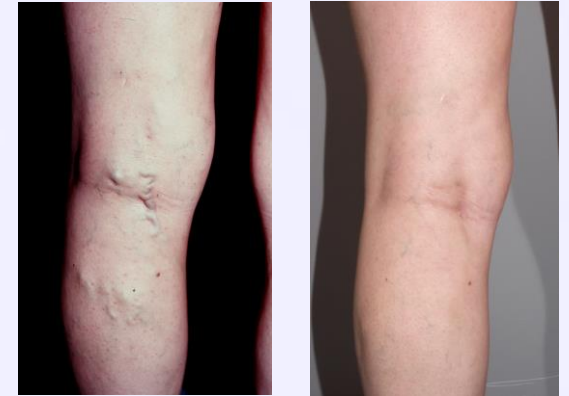
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Injections for large varicose veins