

NOT IN VEIN

Not that I am an expert in varicose vein treatments, but I have had five vein surgeries, three laser treatments and have tried a variety of “natural remedies.” By far, by very far, the best, most effective, least painful treatment was laser ablation. Here’s the deal.

Being blessed with bad genetics, I’ve had severe varicose veins since my early forties. True, I probably aggravated them with a lifetime of running, but that’s beside the point. In the early 1990’s I began to show large, discolored veins in my lower right leg which would occasionally throb or burn, especially after a run. I went to my friendly surgeon and he said they were easy to strip out. “Go for it,” I told him.

Stripping was, and is, the first option for many doctors. I was put under anesthesia for two hours and woke up to a leg wrapped in bloody gauze under a support hose. I was supposed to keep the leg elevated for a week and had to walk with crutches. I have several inch-long scars to show for it. Just to add to the fun, it hurt a bunch. Oh yeah, the veins came back a few years later. A nurse later told me she had assisted on many of these surgeries and she called the procedure “barbaric.” I was able to resume running two months later.

By the mid-nineties I had varicose veins on both lower legs. This time I never considered stripping, so I went with the microsurgery under mild anesthesia. That’s the one where they make numerous quarter-inch incisions and pull out the offending veins. I was amazed my right leg had almost as many “bad” veins as my left. It was an hour and a half procedure with minimal pain. It was expensive, and not covered by insurance. I was off my feet for a week and could run a month later. And I had a new batch of varicose veins on my left leg within three years.

I returned to the doctor who did the microsurgery and she said, “Sure they came back - we didn’t take out the saphinous vein in your thigh. We need to strip that one.” Nice (why hadn’t they told me that before?). I had no interest in stripping, so I next tried a superficial laser treatment. Done in the dermatologist’s office, a laser zaps the varicose veins through the skin. My veins were big and not responding so they ramped up the current. It hurt and smelled of burning hair. After three treatments that did nothing, I was feeling like a masochist and didn’t go back.

I was starting to think I’d just live with the offending veins. Then I heard about laser ablation. I have a friend who’s a radiologist and was just talking to him at the health club; he mentioned this new treatment that one of the doctors in his office was doing for varicose veins.

Long story short, it was an amazing process. Using an ultrasound, the doctor guides a laser inside the saphinous vein and closes the vein from the inside. The only pain is from several injections of lidocaine to deaden the area. Some of the bad veins in the lower leg then collapse and those that don’t are removed a couple of weeks later with

an abbreviated microsurgery. You walk out of the office without a limp and could walk home if you wanted to. It was virtually painless. Actually the biggest pain was the aggravation of putting on the support hose everyday for two weeks, but after all the other treatments I'd had I wasn't complaining. I walked a couple of miles the day of the surgery and was running in a week.

It's been 18 months since my treatment and I've sent numerous friends to get the treatment. I've had no recurrence of varicose veins and no side effects. In short, laser ablation is a remarkable treatment, which in my non-medical opinion is far superior and far more effective than the other popular treatments available.

Finally, I've known John and Valjean Schroll for many years, and you could not work with more dedicated or caring people. I recommend them wholeheartedly. I would have loved having Dr. John perform my laser "surgery" but I live in Florida.

Todd Rainsberger, Ph.D.