

Varicose veins in pregnancy

Varicose veins are swollen and enlarged veins. They are usually found in your legs and feet. They are often blue or purple and twisty in appearance.

During pregnancy you can also get varicose veins in your vulva.

► [What is your vulva](#)

Signs of varicose veins

If you have varicose veins you may notice:

- your feet, ankles or legs are swollen
- your legs ache or feel heavy
- dry and itchy skin over the veins
- [leg cramps](#) at night

Varicose veins can be uncomfortable but they are not dangerous for you or your baby.

It is a good idea to mention your varicose veins to your GP, midwife or obstetrician when you see them.

When to get medical help

Contact your GP or midwife immediately if you have any of the following symptoms:

- your calf muscles are red, swollen, hot or tender - these could be signs of [deep vein thrombosis \(DVT\)](#)
- swollen legs, a [headache](#), blurred vision or a pain in your upper stomach - these could be signs of [pre-eclampsia](#)

What to do if you have varicose veins

Do

- ✓ rest as much as possible
- ✓ sit with your legs up
- ✓ stay active and do activities that will help your circulation, such as walking or swimming
- ✓ wear comfy, loose clothes, particularly trousers, underwear and socks
- ✓ wear compression stockings which you can get from your pharmacist. Put them on in the morning before your legs swell
- ✓ try to maintain a [healthy weight](#) - extra weight can put more pressure on your veins
- ✓ [foot exercises](#)

Don't

- ✗ do not stand for long periods
- ✗ do not sit with your legs crossed

Foot exercises

These foot exercises can help varicose veins:

1. Bend and stretch your foot up and down 30 times.
2. Rotate your foot 8 times one way and 8 times the other way.
3. Repeat with your other foot.

[Benefits of exercise during pregnancy](#)

Why you may get varicose veins

Your risk of developing varicose veins increases when you're pregnant.

Your baby and placenta (afterbirth) need extra blood so the amount of blood in your body increases. This can stretch your blood vessels.

As your womb grows, it may put pressure on the veins in your legs. This also increases the risk of varicose veins.

The hormonal changes of pregnancy are also another reason that can increase the risk of varicose veins.

Risk factors for developing varicose veins

Some women are more at risk of varicose veins while pregnant.

Genetic factors

If other members of your family have had varicose veins during pregnancy, you may be at higher risk.

Previous history

If you have had varicose veins in the past they are likely to occur again when you become pregnant.

Your weight

If your [body mass index \(BMI\)](#) is high, your risk of varicose veins is higher.

Standing or sitting

Standing or sitting for long periods of time can increase your risk of varicose veins.

Varicose veins after the birth

Most of the time, varicose veins go away on their own or reduce in size 3 or 4 months after the birth of your baby. They may come back the next time you become pregnant.

If your varicose veins don't go away after the birth, you can speak to your GP about treatment options.

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