



The Fall Report: Radio Frequency Ablation

Varicose veins are an age-old problem with a new solution.

Varicose veins are an age-old problem, recognized since 3500 BC and affecting approximately 15% of adults. Women are affected more commonly than men.

The cause of varicose veins remains a subject of some debate. Predisposing factors include aging, heredity and hormonal influences in the female. As a result of these factors, along with defective venous valves, venous wall abnormalities or a previous venous inflammation, varicose veins may develop.

Symptoms include aching and heaviness of the involved extremity, inflammation (phlebitis), skin ulceration along with thickening and discoloration. Although rare, massive bleeding from a varicose vein can be life threatening.

Conservative treatment includes compression stockings, elevation and avoidance of prolonged standing.

Surgery however, is often indicated and surgical procedures can be dated to 86 BC. Until recently, nothing has substantially changed with multiple incision phlebectomy (removal of varicose veins) with the exception of modern anesthesia and antisepsis. Traditionally, surgery was tedious, time consuming, required multiple incisions and in many instances had an un-acceptable recurrence rate.

Fortunately, times have changed.

Recently, an innovative new technique has emerged, revolutionizing the treatment of this complicated and debilitating disease. Using more sophisticated diagnostic studies, the cause of varicose veins can be much more clearly identified. With that information, and new instruments, varicose veins can be removed under direct vision. Instead of operative times of three to four hours, surgery time has typically been reduced to less than one hour. Rather than twenty to forty incisions (cuts), this relatively new technique completes the surgery with only six to eight incisions. Commonly, the patient goes home only a few hours after surgery, not one to two days as was common in the past.

Another new technique will soon be arriving to Fall General Surgery. This technology is called radio frequency ablation. When indicated, the varicose vein can be destroyed in the office, no hospitalization required!

Commonly, small unsightly asymptomatic veins may develop in conjunction with more significant venous disease. These are called “spider veins.” Effective treatment can be provided in the office with good to excellent cosmetic results.