

# VARICOCELES

Enlarged Veins in the Scrotum



# WHAT IS A VARICOCELE?

A varicocele is a swelling in the veins above the testicles. It is similar to having varicose veins in the legs. The swelling occurs when too much blood collects in the veins. A varicocele most often occurs around the left testicle.

## What Are the Symptoms?

A varicocele often causes no symptoms at all. Or it may cause an achy or heavy feeling in the scrotum. The pain may be worse later in the day or after standing for a long time. You may also see swollen veins under the skin in the scrotum.

## How Is It Diagnosed?

Often a varicocele can be diagnosed during a physical exam. A testicle with enlarged veins may be more tender. A varicocele may also be diagnosed during testing for fertility problems. If you have pain but your doctor cannot feel any enlarged veins, an ultrasound may be done.



## A Varicocele Can Lower Sperm Count

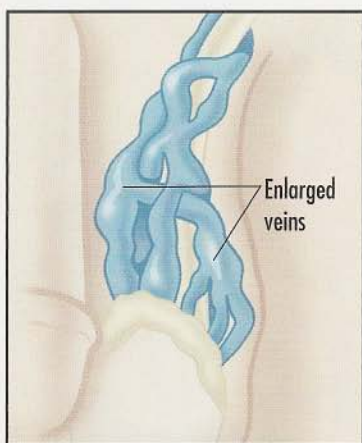
When blood collects in the veins above the testicles, changes occur that can reduce the number and the quality of the sperm. For men who are infertile, around 40-50% may have a varicocele. In many cases, sperm count improves after treatment.

# TREATMENT OPTIONS

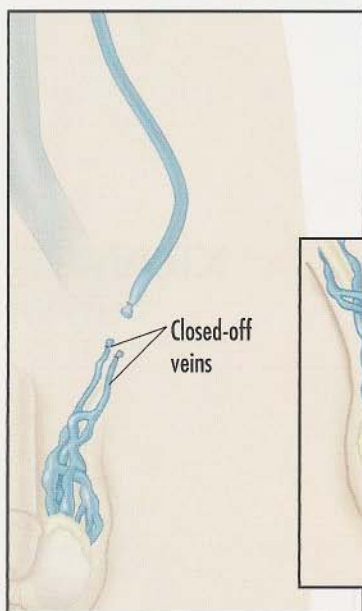
About 1 in 6 men have a varicocele. In most cases, a doctor may wait and watch the problem. If you have a large varicocele, it is painful, or if you and your partner are having trouble getting pregnant, your doctor may advise surgery or another procedure to correct the problem.

## Watchful Waiting

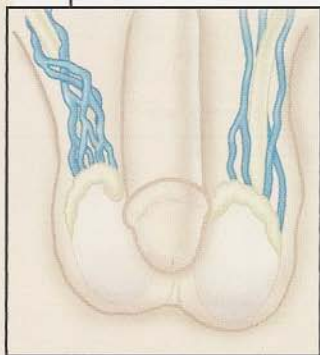
If you don't have any pain and you and your partner are not having trouble getting pregnant, your doctor may suggest just watching the problem for a while. You will need to see your doctor at all your appointments. If the veins don't get larger and there are no other symptoms, you may not need further treatment.



Before surgery, the veins above the testicle are enlarged. This is from blood collecting in the veins.



After surgery, the enlarged veins are tied or sealed off. Veins deeper in the scrotum then carry blood away from the testicles.



Varicocele is not serious. Your pain, if the veins become large, may make it difficult to conceive a baby, your sperm may die, and you may lose off the enlarged veins.

If you are not trying to conceive, you may wait a while. Be sure to keep your sperm count. If they don't bother you,

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## **Surgery (Varicocelectomy)**

Your doctor may suggest surgery to treat enlarged veins around the testicles. In some cases, surgery is done with a laparoscope (a long, thin, telescope-like device).

- First you are given anesthesia to keep you comfortable. You may or may not be asleep.
- One or more tiny incisions are made in the groin or abdomen.
- The veins are then tied or sealed off.
- The incision is closed with sutures, staples, or surgical tape.

## **Varicocele Embolization**

In place of surgery, your doctor may recommend varicocele embolization.

- First you are given anesthesia to keep you comfortable.
- Then a tiny incision is made in the groin or side of the neck.
- A small tube is passed through the incision.
- Guided by x-rays, the doctor passes the tube into the varicocele.
- A tiny coil is sent through the tube. This is to block blood flow to the varicocele.
- The tube is removed. In most cases, stitches are not needed.

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## **When to Call Your Doctor**

Call your doctor if you have any of the following problems after treatment:

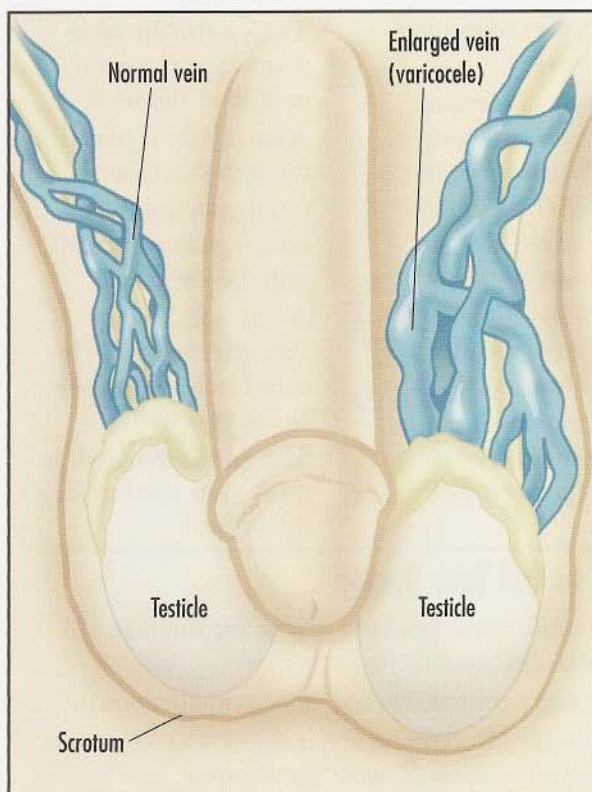
- Ongoing pain not relieved by pain medication
- Black-and-blue around the incision, bleeding from the incision, or swelling in the scrotum
- A fever above 100.2°F (37.9°C), or chills

# VEINS IN THE SCROTUM

The **scrotum** is a sac of skin that covers the **testicles**—the male sex organs that produce sperm and the male hormones. Blood vessels in the scrotum carry blood to and from the testicles. The vessels that carry blood away from the testicles are called **veins**.

## When There's a Problem in the Veins

The veins that carry blood from the testicles extend up into the groin. That means the blood has to travel upward a long way. Valves in the veins act like gates to keep the blood from flowing back toward the testicles. In some men, these valves don't close fully. Or the muscles in the walls of the veins may be weak. Then some blood flows back into the scrotum. The blood collects in the veins above the testicles. This makes the veins enlarge.



# WITH OR WITHOUT TREATMENT

A varicocele is seldom a serious medical problem. If you have pain, treatment will most likely relieve your symptoms. If a varicocele is causing infertility, treatment may improve your sperm count. Whether or not you have treatment, you can lead a normal, active life.



**Consultant:**  
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