

VARICOSE VEINS AND HEMORRHOIDS

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Jody had severe leg and vulvar varicose veins which had become very difficult during her second pregnancy. She also had perineal tearing at birth requiring stitches. Now in her third pregnancy, the varicosities were becoming a problem, and were looking extremely red and inflamed. She began a therapeutic dietary and herbal program to include foods high in bioflavonoids and rutin, nettles infusion and hawthorn tincture, and regular periods of rest as well as daily inversion on a slant board. Externally she applied compresses of witch hazel extract from the pharmacy. The inflammation completely subsided and while the varicosities were still obviously visible throughout the pregnancy, they remained unproblematic, and Jody gave birth at home with no difficulty. In addition, she had no perineal tearing with this birth.

Varicose veins occur when the valves that keep blood flowing one way through the vessels become weak, allowing blood to pool up in the veins and causing the veins to become lax and distended. This weakness of the valves may be due to diet, lack of exercise, or heredity. The hormonal changes of pregnancy can contribute to laxity of the valves. Pregnancy also predisposes women to congestion of blood in the lower body because the pressure from the heavy uterus reduces venous return from the legs and pelvis. Varicosities most commonly occur in the legs and feet, the vulva (vulvar varicosities), and the anus (hemorrhoids). They generally become more pronounced as pregnancy advances. Vulvar varicosities may or may not be noticeable until labor, but women usually notice large ones during pregnancy. A gentle birth and hot compresses applied to the distended veins usually prevent trauma to them. Occasionally, bleeding or a hematoma (an internal pooling of blood from a broken blood vessel) can result and may require medical care. Hemorrhoids usually become enlarged at the birth with the mom's pushing and may persist for a few days postpartum. Again, gentle pushing whenever possible will reduce their severity. Constipation during pregnancy aggravates hemorrhoids and should be treated because it can cause other health problems as well.

Natural remedies regularly taken and applied can effectively prevent and reduce varicose veins.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Follow all dietary and exercise suggestions, and use appropriate herbal remedies.

- Exercise can vastly improve circulation and must be a vital component in both the prevention and treatment of varicosities. By increasing your circulatory rate you are effectively removing stagnation in your blood vessels and directly reducing blood congestion, a primary factor in varicosities.
- Take a brisk walk for thirty minutes each day or ride a stationary bicycle for approximately that length of time.

- Swimming is also an excellent form of exercise - as you swim, feel the water massaging your legs.
- Yoga postures and commonly known exercises such as leg lifts, lunges, and, if you can do them, shoulder stands can successfully strengthen your circulatory system and encourage venous return. Thumb through some of the yoga books listed in "Further Reading" for ideas.
- Vigorous pelvic tilting vastly improves pelvic circulation and venous return. This can be done for five to ten minutes daily. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, hands on your hips. Slowly tip your pelvis forward, then backward, gradually increasing your speed until you are swinging your hips forward and backward vigorously. You can also roll and rock your hips and make "figure eights" in belly-dancer fashion.
- Dance, dance, dance! Open to your creative flow as you exercise your legs, pelvis, heart, and spirit.
- In addition to exercising daily, you will want to spend at least twenty minutes, twice a day, with your feet elevated higher than the level of your heart. Putting your legs and feet up on two pillows as you recline is usually sufficient. If you are sitting at a desk, put your feet up on it!
- Don't sit in one place for any length of time because it encourages insufficient pelvic and leg circulation. Get up and walk around about once an hour for ten minutes to improve blood flow. You should do this on long car trips in your third trimester of pregnancy even if you don't have varicosities.
- Use support stockings if you have severe varicosities. If you put them on in the morning when you first get up from bed, they will be easier to get on and the most effective. You can dust a bit of slippery elm powder on your legs to help them slide on.