

New Minimally Invasive Treatment For Varicose Veins Now Available At UCSD

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Patients suffering from primary venous insufficiency now have a new treatment option for their varicose veins. A new non-surgical laser treatment for varicose veins showed superior results to traditional surgery in a study published in the August issue of the Journal of Vascular and Interventional Radiology. The minimally invasive laser therapy is now available at UCSD Medical Center.

According to Gerant Rivera, M.D., the UCSD Interventional Radiologist heading up the new laser treatment program, the study conducted at Weill Cornell Vascular in New York showed that the EndoVenous Laser Treatment has a 98 percent success rate, and a long-term recurrence rate of less than 7%. These results surpass traditional surgical ligation and vein stripping, which require general anesthesia and up to two weeks recuperation time.

Rivera performs the new minimally invasive laser treatment as an outpatient procedure using duplex ultrasound imaging guidance. He cuts a nick the size of a pen tip, and inserts a narrow catheter into the saphenous vein all the way up to the thigh. The machine applies laser energy to the vein interior, an action that heats the vein and seals it closed.

"By shutting off the greater saphenous vein, the varicose branch below shrinks dramatically," says Rivera. "The vein appearance improves. Other healthier veins take the place of the diseased vein and re-establish normal blood flow."

Rivera says that unlike traditional surgery this new minimally invasive procedure takes just 45 minutes and patients can walk out of the hospital afterwards. They wear a stocking for a week and can return to work right away. Patients experience minimal complications such as heaviness in the leg, and tightness as the vein shrinks during the two weeks following the procedure.

Prior to the laser, for the previous decade physicians have been using radio frequency ablation to treat varicose veins. Rivera says that one of the reasons UCSD opted to begin laser treatment is that radio frequency (RF) ablation has been associated with slightly less closure of the vein and a relatively high recurrence rate compared to the laser. He also states that the new laser treatment does not produce any of the potential complications caused by RF ablation, which include skin burns, neuropathy, pain, and leg swelling.

To make an appointment at UCSD for a laser treatment consultation, call Interventional Radiology, Thornton Hospital, at 858-657-6657.

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