

# VARICOSE VEINS

**Dr. Lee Soon Khai, Consultant Vascular and Endovascular Surgeon from Pantai Hospital Kuala Lumpur, explains**



Dr. Lee Soon Khai is one of a handful of Consultant Vascular and Endovascular Surgeons who do the EVLT procedure in Malaysia.

"A few of my patients have woken up in the middle of the night in a pool of blood," related Consultant Vascular and Endovascular Surgeon, Dr. Lee Soon Khai. "The engorged veins probably burst due to the patient scratching or rubbing their legs against the bed sheet." Dr Lee is one of a handful of Vascular Surgeons who treat varicose veins with laser technology in Malaysia. He was trained in the Royal Perth Hospital, Australia and Alabama Phlebology Training Institute, Alabama, USA.

Dr Lee sees a wide range of vein-related problems. Many patients present themselves with large deep painful ulcers on their legs. Often, they have had these ulcers for some time, and dress them repeatedly, hoping that they will go away. But this type of ulcer will not heal unless the underlying problem is treated.

When everything is working well, the muscle pump in the legs propel the blood towards the heart and the valves within the veins prevent backflow. The vein starts to become varicose when these valves fail in this function. The backflow builds pressure within the vein, causing the veins to be bulgy and wiry. The leg starts to swell when the fluid from the veins is forced out into the surrounding tissues. As the swelling becomes worse, the patient will start to feel heaviness and in the later stages develop pain in the legs. Spider veins may be associated with varicose veins.

More serious complications may arise. Thrombophlebitis, for example, is inflammation of the vein due to infection of the varicose vein. Another complication is lipodermatosclerosis, where the skin above the ankle darkens, hardens, swells up and reddens, leading to an appearance like an upside down champagne bottle. Eventually, some of these patients may develop venous ulcers.

"Treating varicose veins is not just about vanity and beauty," Dr. Lee emphasises. "There are serious quality of life issues as well."

According to Dr. Lee, there are several methods of treating these venous problems

depending on their severity. Spider veins can be treated with scleroscent injections that close up the veins. This procedure is effective and straightforward.

For the varicose veins, there are two options. They can be surgically removed by stripping – a method that is invasive and requires general anaesthetic. Or they can be better treated through a minimally invasive procedure called Endovenous Laser Treatment, or EVLT for short.

"EVLT is done under local anaesthesia and involves passing a laser fibre through a needle placed in the vein," says Dr. Lee.

"When the vein is closed by the laser's heat,

our body will naturally absorb this vein within six months.

"EVLT is a low-risk, minimally invasive treatment with a high rate of success, and low recurrence rate – making it a treatment of choice for varicose veins," says Dr. Lee.

Depending on how severe the problem is, EVLT takes about 30 to 60 minutes per leg and is done as a daycare procedure – meaning that patients return home the same day. Having done over 200 varicose vein cases over the past few years, Dr. Lee says that patient satisfaction after EVLT treatment is what gives him the most pleasure.



Complications caused by varicose veins, from left: thrombophlebitis, lipodermatosclerosis, venous ulcer.



Spider veins: Before and after treatment.



Venous ulcers: Before and after treatment.

PICTURES COURTESY OF DR. LEE SOON KHAI.