

This is any condition where there is inflammation of a vein. It can refer to superficial veins in the legs or deep veins in the muscles of the leg or pelvis.

What to look for

For superficial phlebitis:

- a hard, red vein visible in your leg; it may be warm and tender.
- fever is possible and sleepless nights as the pain worsens.
- a throbbing or burning sensation beneath the skin's surface.

For deep phlebitis:

- potentially no symptoms.
- pain deep inside the leg and swelling in the ankle

Often this condition is followed by thrombosis (clotting of the blood). Therefore phlebitis followed by thrombosis is called thrombophlebitis. These painful clots may partially or fully block blood flow in affected veins.

The superficial phlebitis is the most common form of phlebitis and occurs in veins near the skin's surface usually in the legs. This is usually harmless although painful and uncomfortable.

Deep phlebitis, on the other hand, is less common and more dangerous as it affects the internal veins of the legs. These clots tend to be larger and more able to loosen and travel to other areas. It is also possible for you not to realise you have this problem and it may go untreated.

Causes

The most common cause of phlebitis is varicose veins. Injury can cause phlebitis if a vein is bumped or hurt. Anyone immobilised, such as after surgery, is also vulnerable because blood is not flowing as strongly and clots form more easily. The condition can afflict the elderly, because circulatory problems that can trigger phlebitis tend to worsen with age.

Phlebitis can also develop in response to infection or trauma of some kind.

Doctors have reported that several types of people are at risk. They are women in general, pregnant women, contraceptive pill users and people whose blood tends to clot too easily are at higher risk. People who are significantly overweight, have a sedentary lifestyle, and smoke have also been linked to phlebitis.

Traditional Treatment

Superficial phlebitis can often be treated at home but be sure to get your doctor's opinion on your specific case. Deep phlebitis, however, often requires a short stay in the hospital. Regardless of which type you have, if you smoke, stop. Also try to use another form of contraception besides birth control pills if you suffer from this condition.

Your doctor will recommend appropriate medication to relieve your symptoms. You can buy special support stockings which often help in relieving some of the pain.

If you're diagnosed with deep phlebitis, you will be hospitalised. Your doctor will advise of the appropriate course of treatment best for you.

Dietary Considerations

If you smoke - give this up immediately, it can only make matters worse for you. Also eat more oily fish such as salmon and tuna, fruit and vegetables, fibre and spicy foods. Also drink plenty of filtered water. Try not to stand for long periods of time and do some gentle exercise once the condition subsides a little.

Personal Care

For superficial phlebitis, there are things at home you can do to ease the pain and help you heal: Get plenty of rest while you have the condition.

When you lie down, boost your legs up so they are 6 to 12 inches above your heart level.

Apply a heating pad or pack to swollen areas for relief.

When to seek further professional advice

- you suspect you have phlebitis; you need proper diagnosis and treatment.
- symptoms of superficial phlebitis do not dissipate within a week
- you notice lumps, high fever, or extreme pain or swelling throughout a limb.