

business spotlight



THE HEART HOUSE™

All heart. All options



Healthy Legs, Healthy Heart

At The Heart House Vein Center, doctors treat more than just the legs.

By **Liz Hunter**

VENOUS DISEASES ARE VERY COMMON and can be physically and cosmetically devastating for sufferers. The statistics alone are staggering. More than 80 million Americans have some form of vein disease. Among that, the majority are women, including 95 percent of women who have had children. The appearance of spider or varicose veins can cause severe discomfort, and many people don't realize the two are connected.

"In addition to the visible signs on your legs, spider veins and varicose veins can be a debilitating condition with pain, burning and itching in the legs and fatigue," says Dr. Sanford J. Gips, MD, FACC, FSCAI. "Some people think it's normal to have these symptoms and they go on without treatment."

The Heart House has offices across South Jersey. Its dedicated vein center opened in 2014 and is led by board-certified interventional cardiologists who help to examine a person's vein disorder and proceed with a treatment plan that ensures an outcome that is both cosmetically and medically pleasing.

Many times, the appearance of veins in the legs can be signs of

a larger issue, says Dr. Gips. It's important to look at the varying causes. "Genetics is the No. 1 cause of vein disease. Other factors are pregnancy, age, weight, hormonal changes, or even jobs that require long periods of standing," he says.

"The common denominator is the breakdown of the valves in the veins. The veins' job is to bring blood from the legs back to the heart. Gravity wants the blood to remain in the legs, but the valves overcome gravity by pushing blood up and keeping it from coming back down. Sometimes, those valves can start to leak, leading to varicose or spider veins."

In addition to visible varicose veins, severe cases of "leaky veins" can result in edema, swelling, and ultimately, ulcers.

For this reason, doctors at The Heart House don't treat just the legs, they examine the whole patient.

"If there is swelling, we ensure that the patient's heart has been evaluated in the recent past to make sure we're not missing signs of heart failure," says Dr. Vijay K. Verma, MD, FACC, FSCAI. "At The Heart House we have the ability to screen for multiple causes and



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symptoms that might not purely be related to veins.”

Dr. Gips agrees. “We’re not just experts in the heart, but the entire cardiovascular system, which includes the veins.”

Treatments vary depending on the symptoms. Varicose veins are swollen, dark blue or purple blood vessels that appear on the calves, thighs, legs and ankles. People can experience leg swelling, tired or restless legs, cramps and itching. Spider veins are smaller, thinner blood vessels that look like a series of branches or often like a spider or web shape with a dark center.

“When patients first come to see us we talk about management strategies, which might include wearing compression stockings, elevating their legs whenever possible, or over-the-counter medications,” says Dr. Verma. “We’ll start with these strategies first, but they are very conservative and often don’t work in the long term.”

When more serious treatment is called for, the procedure with the most success is called laser ablation. In this procedure a small catheter is inserted into the vein, and a laser delivers energy to shrink and close the

problem vein. Dr. Gips adds that this treatment relieves the pressure causing veins to dilate, which leads to reduced swelling.

“In days past, surgeons would perform vein stripping, leaving scars and a longer recovery period,” says Dr. Gips. “Now we’re using this laser that is less invasive and clinically proven to be more successful than vein stripping.” In addition, laser therapy is typically covered by health insurance.

For less severe types of vein diseases, such as small spider veins, The Heart House offers treatment with sclerotherapy. Here, a tiny needle is used to inject a medication directly into the vein, causing the vein to close and disappear over time. Sclerotherapy takes about 15 minutes, and may require several treatments. This procedure is considered cosmetic, and is not usually covered by insurance.

One of the biggest advantages of these treatments is the reduced recovery time, says Dr. Verma. “These procedures are performed in our office. There is no need to go to the hospital and have surgery. Risk is low and recovery time is minimized. Typically, the treatment area is wrapped in a bandage and

the patient can walk out of the office.”

Soreness may occur for a day or two, but most patients return to work within 48 hours, if not the next day, Dr. Verma adds. Follow-up appointments include an ultrasound to ensure the vein has been closed and that there is no clot. Future treatments may be required for touch-ups, but Dr. Gips says these treatments provide long-term relief.

“We have been most surprised by how much better patients feel after treatment,” he says. “Not just in terms of the cosmetic outcome, but in terms of fatigue, itching, burning. As board-certified cardiologists, we’re going to evaluate the patient as a whole and treat the entire cardiovascular system, not just their legs.” ■

The Heart House Vein Center

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