

Pregnancy and Leg Health

THE IMPACT OF PREGNANCY ON LEGS

During pregnancy, many hormonal changes occur in a woman's body. These hormonal changes can have profound effects on the veins, particularly as they cause the volume of blood to increase to nurture the developing baby. Greater amounts of blood can stretch the vein and damage the vein valves.

This can cause a number of venous and circulatory problems that include:

- Swollen ankles
- Tired, aching legs
- Spider veins
- Varicose veins

As the baby grows, the enlarged uterus applies direct pressure on the vena cava which returns blood flow to the heart. This pressure can cause stasis reflux and valve damage which results in swelling, leg discomfort and even varicose veins.

Postpartum

In the weeks following delivery, the amount of blood in the veins, as well as hormone levels, generally return to normal levels. Most varicose veins seem to disappear; however, permanent vein damage has likely occurred.



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PREGNANCY INTRODUCES A FOUR-FOLD RISK OF DEVELOPING A BLOOD CLOT¹

Women who are pregnant or who have just given birth are at **increased risk for blood clots**. That risk actually increases to about 20-fold in the weeks immediately following childbirth, and is at its highest – a risk of 100-fold – in the first week after the baby is born.¹

Studies demonstrate that **gradient compression** stockings are beneficial in **relieving symptoms of CVD** during pregnancy and the postpartum period.²

Other counseling tips for pregnant women:

- When resting, keep legs elevated
- Avoid standing for long periods
- Don't cross legs while sitting
- When traveling longer distances, stop frequently to stretch legs and take short walks

1. Pregnancy and blood clots. <http://www.womenandbloodclots.org/pregnancy-and-post-childbirth>. The National Blood Clot Alliance.

2. Büchtemann AS, et al.: The effect of compression therapy in venous haemodynamics in pregnant women. Br J Obstet Gynaecol. 106(6):563-9. June 1999.