

VENICE PLASTIC SURGERY

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Cosmetic, Reconstructive, Face, Breast, and Hand Surgery

Misconceptions About Circulation

Many misconceptions are based on some knowledge. Vitamin C is necessary for healing but more of the vitamin does not strengthen or hasten healing. If a little is good a lot is not better and may actually be bad for you. Too much vitamin A can kill you for example.

Most of my wound clinic patients have leg and foot wounds. This area of the body generally has the worst circulation as we age. The legs are furthest from the heart. The nutrient carrying blood travels in arteries a long way to get there. The blood must then get back to the heart in the veins. Anything that slows or stops the flow in either direction is bad.

There are medications that are thought to increase blood flow to the legs. Some think that blood thinners as aspirin help. It is well known that aspirin is a blood thinner and may help prevent heart attacks. The action is not by increasing blood flow but rather by slowing blood clot formation. A narrowed blood vessel may clot off stopping all flow. If that clotting off process can be lessened then further blockage may be minimized.

Some folks like to wrap their leg in a heating pad. Never do this. I have seen numerous burns. Some were third degree burns. The same is true for putting your leg in warm water. People with decreased feelings as diabetics have burned themselves. They cannot feel how hot the water really is. Lukewarm water may feel good but will not restore impaired circulation in the leg.

The most common thing I hear is that exercise increases circulation. The answer is yes and no. Young athletes doing vigorous training may actually expand blood vessels and even grow some very small new ones, maybe. However, older people with hardening of the arteries cannot expand their blood vessels much if at all. The growth of new vessels probably does not occur.

When the major artery to the leg has a 60 or 80 percent blockage no exercise will make the blockage go away. Some of the minor arteries may help get the circulation down to the foot but these vessels are probably diseased as well. They cannot expand or grow to better circulation. Eating better or taking vitamins will not remove the blockage. Nor will physical therapy or massage. A massage may feel good but will not reverse hardening of the arteries.

When the circulation slows your leg develops pain when walking. This is similar to a heart attack or angina. Your heart becomes painful when it gets insufficient blood flow to nourish it's muscles. A heart bypass operation adds new blood vessels to get more flow to the heart muscle. For the legs a similar bypass procedure may be needed.

Exercise is generally good for your health but will not restore poor circulation in older individuals. Activities must be tailored to your health and age. A little exercise may be good for you but too much may be detrimental. Consult your doctor before making major changes in your activity levels.

**The above represents the opinion of A. E. Haas, M.D.
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Just call us directly. No referral needed unless required by your insurance company

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