Most-Asked Questions About Vascular Disease

2017’s most frequently asked questions about vein and artery disease

CHICAGO, Illinois, December 18, 2017 – For patients and their families, when the doctor talks about vascular disease it can be baffling. Vascular diseases have long, complicated names or acronyms and refer to parts of the body we sometimes don’t understand.

That’s where the Society for Vascular Surgery patient information website can help. The site attracts many thousands of visitors every month looking for information about vascular diseases and disorders, which affect the veins and arteries.

Based on SVS website traffic, here are the most-clicked vascular health topics of 2017 with links to more information:

1. **What is vascular disease?** Blood vessels -- arteries carrying oxygen-rich blood and veins carrying blood back to the heart -- are the roadways of the circulatory system.

   Without smoothly flowing blood, the body cannot function. Conditions such as hardening of the arteries can create “traffic jams” when plaque obstructs the flow of blood to any part of the body. Other vascular problems may be congenital or develop after pregnancy or a health issue.

2. **What is a vascular surgeon?** Vascular surgeons are highly trained to treat diseases of the vascular system. Simply being referred to a vascular surgeon does not automatically mean you will have surgery. Vascular surgeons can do any kind of vascular surgery, but many patients don’t require it and can be treated with medication or exercise.

3. **What is chronic venous insufficiency (CVI)?** The illness that generates the most queries to SVS occurs in the veins, which return blood to the heart to receive more oxygen. Veins have valves that push the blood “uphill” to the heart.

   CVI occurs when valves in your veins (usually in the legs but sometimes the arms) don’t work properly, causing blood to pool in your extremities and putting increased pressure on the walls of the veins. Valve dysfunction can be hereditary or due to valve destruction after a deep vein thrombosis (DVT) or blood clot.

4. **What is a carotid endarterectomy (CEA)?** Carotid arteries in the neck bring oxygenated blood to the brain. If a
carotid artery becomes more than 50 percent blocked, a vascular surgeon may recommend that the artery be cleaned out with a CAE procedure to prevent a stroke. Like many kinds of vascular surgery, CEA is a constantly evolving procedure, so be sure to ask the surgeon about all your options.

5. What is an abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA)? Many people have heard of brain aneurysms in which a brain blood vessel bursts, but the same thing can happen in the aorta, the largest artery in the body.

The aorta runs from the heart to the lower abdomen, where it splits off to send blood to the legs. Aneurysms can occur anywhere along the aorta. An AAA is extremely serious, and is the 10th leading cause of death in men over age 55. While aneurysms tend to run in families, the good news is that today surgeons have much better tools and techniques to save lives endangered by AAA.

6. What is endovascular repair of abdominal aortic aneurysms (EVAR)? One of the most important advances in the treatment of AAA is EVAR, in which the aorta can be repaired through a small incision. Vascular surgeons slide very tiny equipment through the arteries to the site of the aneurysm and install a stent. Depending on where the aneurysm is located, they may perform more complex repairs by sewing in a device that exactly fits with your anatomy.

7. What is an angiogram? An angiogram is an X-ray procedure that can be both diagnostic and therapeutic. It is considered the gold standard for evaluating blockages in the arterial system. An angiogram detects blockages using X-rays taken during the injection of a contrast agent (iodine dye). The procedure provides information that helps your vascular surgeon determine your best treatment options.
Angiograms are typically performed while you are sedated. The procedure may last 15-20 minutes or up to several hours, depending on how difficult the test is and how much treatment is given.

Learn more about different vascular conditions and how they are treated. Visit Vascular.org/Patient-Resources.