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A Guide for Patients: May Thurner Syndrome



May Thurner syndrome is a medical condition that happens when a vein going from the left leg to the abdomen, called the iliac vein, is pinched. The job of leg veins is to return blood from the feet to the heart. However, when the iliac vein is pinched, this leg vein's blood flow is blocked. This vein blockage can cause leg pain and swelling.

Symptoms

Patients with mild pinching or squeezing of the iliac vein might not show any symptoms. Patients with moderate pinching or squeezing may experience chronic left leg pain, heaviness, varicose veins, swelling, or skin changes. Patients with a severely pinched or squeezed left iliac vein may experience a blood clot in the left leg with sudden severe leg swelling, pain, and color changes. While May Thurner syndrome affects the left leg, compression can also occur on the right iliac vein from other mechanisms.



May Thurner syndrome is usually diagnosed with a pelvic CT scan or MRI. Sometimes, a venogram or intravascular ultrasound is necessary to make the diagnosis.

Causes and Risks

Patients with May Thurner syndrome have too small of a space between the iliac artery and the vertebral backbone. Therefore, the iliac vein is pinched or squeezed and becomes narrowed.

Diagnosis

May Thurner syndrome is usually diagnosed with a pelvic CT scan or MRI. Sometimes, a venogram or intravascular ultrasound is necessary to make the diagnosis.

Treatment

Patients diagnosed with May Thurner syndrome who have no symptoms usually do not need treatment. Patients with mild symptoms may only require compression stockings. Patients with severe symptoms may require a procedure. The most common

procedure is placement of a left iliac vein stent to fix the blockage. This endovascular procedure is minimally invasive and done only with needles, wires, and catheters.

Role of a Vascular Surgeon

Vascular surgeons work as part of the overall healthcare team to treat patients with May Thurner syndrome. For patients experiencing severe symptoms, a vascular surgeon might insert a stent into the iliac vein. If patients develop blood clots or deep vein thrombosis, a vascular surgeon will perform a thrombectomy to remove the clot.

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