



Highway to Health Patient Toolkit

Learn the best ways to maximize vascular health at every age, look for the early warning signs of common vascular conditions, *and ask why a vascular surgeon is right for you!*

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Vascular Health

What is the vascular system?

The vascular system is about 60,000 miles long – equivalent to driving across the United States 20 times or 2.5 times the distance around the planet.

As one of the largest organ systems, the vascular system is like a network of highways, with blood vessels (veins, arteries, and capillaries) delivering oxygen and moving blood to every part of the body.



60,000
Miles Long

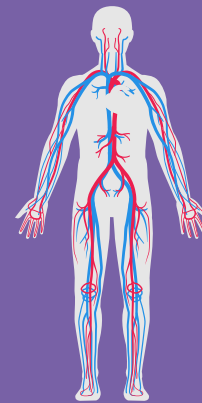


[Click here to watch video](#)

How is it different from your heart health?

Vascular health extends beyond heart health. Heart health deals with the well-being of your heart and the vessels in and out of the heart, while vascular health encompasses the blood vessels throughout the rest of your body.

Vascular surgeons are the long-term primary care providers for vascular health, managing veins and arteries in every part of the body except the brain and the heart. [SVS]



Vascular health is impacted by the blood vessels throughout your body.

Why is it important?

Vascular conditions can affect the flow of blood throughout your body. When blood vessels become diseased and damaged, the blood flow becomes inadequate. This affects the ability of various parts of your body to function normally. If a blood vessel becomes weak, it can even rupture and bleed.

Vascular conditions can lead to serious health consequences including heart attack, stroke, amputation, and even death.

Maintaining vascular health at every age is critical to living longer and, in better health, doing the activities you enjoy.

The Importance of Vascular Health

Who does vascular disease impact?

Vascular conditions affect more than 40 million Americans. That's nearly 70% of all adults over the age of 65. [National Library of Medicine]

+40 Million Americans are affected.

That is almost **70%** of all adults over 65.

What are the conditions/diseases?

Nearly one in three Americans have not heard of any of the most common vascular diseases, like PAD, CAD, or abdominal aortic aneurysm. [Vascular Health Consumer Survey]



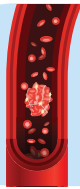
Peripheral artery disease (PAD): A chronic condition where plaque builds up in the arteries that carry blood to your legs, gradually narrowing the arteries. If left untreated, PAD can lead to serious complications, including amputation, difficulty walking, and death.



Carotid artery disease (CAD): Results from the carotid arteries becoming narrow or obstructed, which can lead to strokes, "mini-strokes", and possibly dementia.



Abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA): When the aorta wall weakens over time and begins to bulge like a balloon. If left untreated, an AAA may get bigger and eventually rupture, causing severe internal bleeding and often death.



Deep vein thrombosis (DVT): When a blood clot forms in a deep vein, usually in the legs, it can partially or completely block blood flow. If the clot moves it can go to your heart and lungs cutting off your wind and even causing your death.



Varicose veins: Swollen, blue, bulging, ugly veins that appear under the skin on your leg. They can cause leg pain, heaviness, and swelling. Some people will suffer blood clots and even skin damage that leads to open sores.







In the United States, **pulmonary embolism (PE)** occurs when a part of the DVT clot breaks off and travels to the lungs. PE is responsible for approximately **60,000-100,000 deaths** annually.

Signs & Symptoms

Vascular disease can be silent and deadly.

Signs and symptoms can go unnoticed or unrecognized and cause serious or life-threatening complications if left untreated. Some warning signs can be easily ignored or minimized as “just a part of getting older.”

What are the signs and symptoms?

-  Stroke
-  Pain, swelling, or discoloration in the legs, arms, and feet
-  Sudden, severe pain in the stomach or lower back
-  Leg cramps
-  Hair loss on lower part of leg
-  Difficulty walking
-  Cold or numb toes
-  No symptoms



Don't ignore these symptoms or warning signs. Ask your primary care doctor about seeing a **vascular surgeon** – the specialty with the most comprehensive training for the treatment of vascular diseases.

What are the risk factors for common vascular diseases?

- Over 65 years old
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Use or history of tobacco products

Learn Your SVS Strong Vessel Score:

Click the circle that aligns with how many risk factors you may have.

-  No Risk Factors
-  Some Risk Factors
-  Many Risk Factors

What can I do to improve my Strong Vessel Score?

Luckily, there are things you can do to decrease your risk and maintain your vascular vitality:

- Control blood pressure
- Manage cholesterol levels
- Eat a heart-healthy diet
- Exercise regularly
- Connect with a vascular surgeon
- Stop smoking

Diagnosis & Treatment

Get Diagnosed, Get Treated

If you are experiencing any signs or symptoms associated with vascular diseases, have a discussion with your doctor.

When should I see a vascular specialist/surgeon?

You might be referred to a vascular surgeon if you:

1. See your regular doctor for concerning symptoms and learn that you might have a vascular disease.
2. Have risk factors for developing vascular diseases.

How do I get diagnosed?





A vascular surgeon will complete a series of tests, dependent on your symptoms and risk factors, to come to a diagnosis.

What types of screening are there?

There are various types of screening options, primarily involving a discussion of risk factors and symptoms as well as an examination of your blood vessels. Based on a conversation between you and a vascular surgeon, they will be able to determine the best screening and diagnostic tests for you.

What are the treatment options?

There are a variety of treatment options depending on the vascular disease and the severity of the condition. Some options include:

-  Lifestyle changes
-  Non-surgical procedures
-  Medications
-  Surgery



For best outcomes treatments should happen only when necessary. Vascular surgeons meet patients where they are in their vascular health journey, individualize their care and **partner with them on their vascular health care journey.**

Who is Your Care Team?

Your primary care doctor or cardiologist may refer you to a vascular surgeon to receive specialized care for a vascular disease.



What does a vascular surgeon do?



Watch the video to learn more about the role of a vascular surgeon

Vascular surgeons take care of the superhighway that is your vascular system, ensuring that your vessels flow smoothly and blocked or broken blood vessels are repaired or reconstructed.

While vascular surgeons perform surgery, they see and treat many patients who don't require surgery. They treat a wide range of vascular diseases, aiming to improve blood flow, reduce symptoms, and prevent serious complications, like preserving limbs. [SVS]

How do I find a vascular surgeon?

To find a vascular specialist through the Society for Vascular Surgery (SVS), you can follow these steps:

1.

Visit Your Vascular Health Website:

Go to the official website at YourVascularHealth.org.

2.

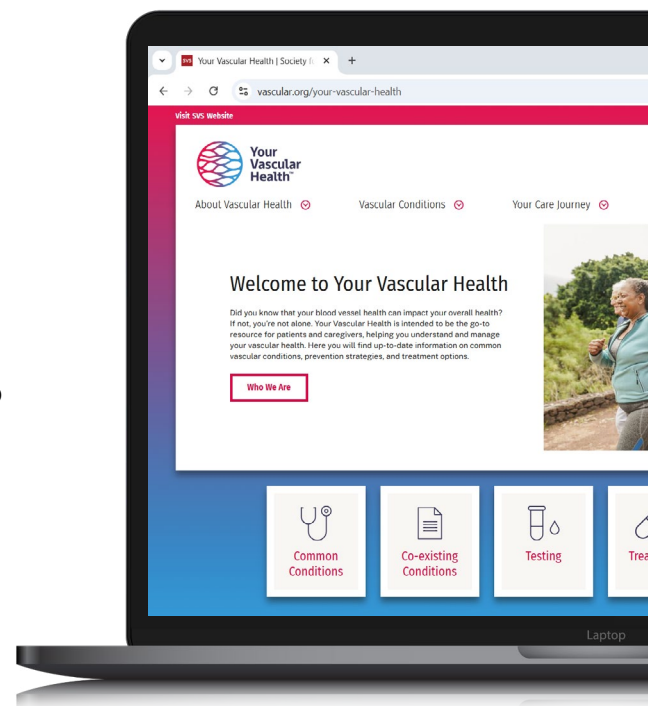
Find the “Find a Vascular Surgeon” Tool:

In the top right hand corner of the website, click on “Find a Vascular Surgeon. This tool is designed to help you locate board-certified vascular surgeons who are members of the SVS.

3.

Search by Location:

Enter your location (zip code, city, or state) in the search field. You can adjust the search radius to find specialists near you.



How does a vascular surgeon differ from other specialties?

There are several different types of specialists treating vascular disease. However, vascular surgeons are the only medical specialty **100% focused, trained, and dedicated to vascular conditions.**



Specialty	Vascular Surgery	General Cardiology	Interventional Cardiology	Interventional Radiology
Treats only vascular conditions	Yes	No	No	No
Amount of Formal Training/Education in Vascular Diseases	24-36 months 100% focused on vascular disease	Some and variable	Some and variable	Moderate and variable
Minimum number of documented major vascular cases required prior to receiving board certification	250	None	None	None
Required Surgical Training	Yes	No	No	No
Required Endovascular Training	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Vascular-specific Specialty Board Exam Content	100% of questions	6% of questions	10% of questions	50% of questions
Provides Direct patient Care	Yes	Yes	Yes	Variable
Typically has hospital admitting privileges	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not commonly
Performs diagnostic procedures	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Has an outpatient clinic or office for patient visits	Yes	Yes	Yes	Frequently
Performs minimally invasive procedures (angioplasty, stents etc)	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Performs open surgical repairs	Yes	No	No	No
Performs hybrid procedures (surgery and minimally invasive at same setting)	Yes	No	No	No

* Vascular Specialty Board Exam content is 100% focused on the diagnosis and management of vascular disease

Why would you see a vascular surgeon?

Surgery is only part of the story for vascular surgeons – a significant amount of the care they provide is dedicated to prevention, screening, and medication management.

Some types of surgeons come into your life to perform a procedure, make sure you heal, and then leave; that’s their role. A vascular surgeon may be someone who cares for you

on an ongoing basis for decades. A vascular surgeon often has long-term relationships with patients because vascular disease is usually a long-term condition.

If you have signs, symptoms, risk factors or just have questions about your vascular health, it is a great idea to speak with a vascular surgeon.

Patient Discussion Guide

Guide Your Vessels to Better Health: Patient & Caregiver Conversation Starters



Vascular conditions can alter the flow of blood throughout your body. When vessels become diseased the blood does not flow normally. Without proper blood flow, your body cannot function. Diseased blood vessels can become weak leading to rupture and catastrophic bleeding as well.

**+40 Million
Americans
are affected.**

Vascular conditions affect more than 40 million Americans, but most underestimate their risk – starting a conversation about prevention and management with your doctor can guide you and your blood vessels to better health!

Prevention and management of vascular diseases can help avoid serious health consequences and ensure a better quality of life by making sure our vascular system runs smoothly, delivering oxygen, and keeping blood moving rapidly to every part of the body.

As you prepare to connect with your care team about your vascular health, note any questions you would like to ask during your appointment. This is a great opportunity to learn more about prevention and management, potential treatment options, and ease any concerns you may have. Use this guide during your next appointment and visit yourvascularhealth.org for additional resources.

Questions:

1. What is vascular health, and what are some common vascular diseases?
2. What symptoms and signs should I look out for in vascular disease?
3. Who is at the highest risk for vascular disease?
4. What can I do to prevent or manage vascular disease?
5. What are my screening/diagnosis options?
6. What are my treatment options?
7. What does recovery look like? Will I be able to get back to “normal”?
8. If something is wrong, who should I contact first?
9. How often should I see a vascular specialist?
10. Can vascular diseases be cured?

Download list to bring to your doctor appointment