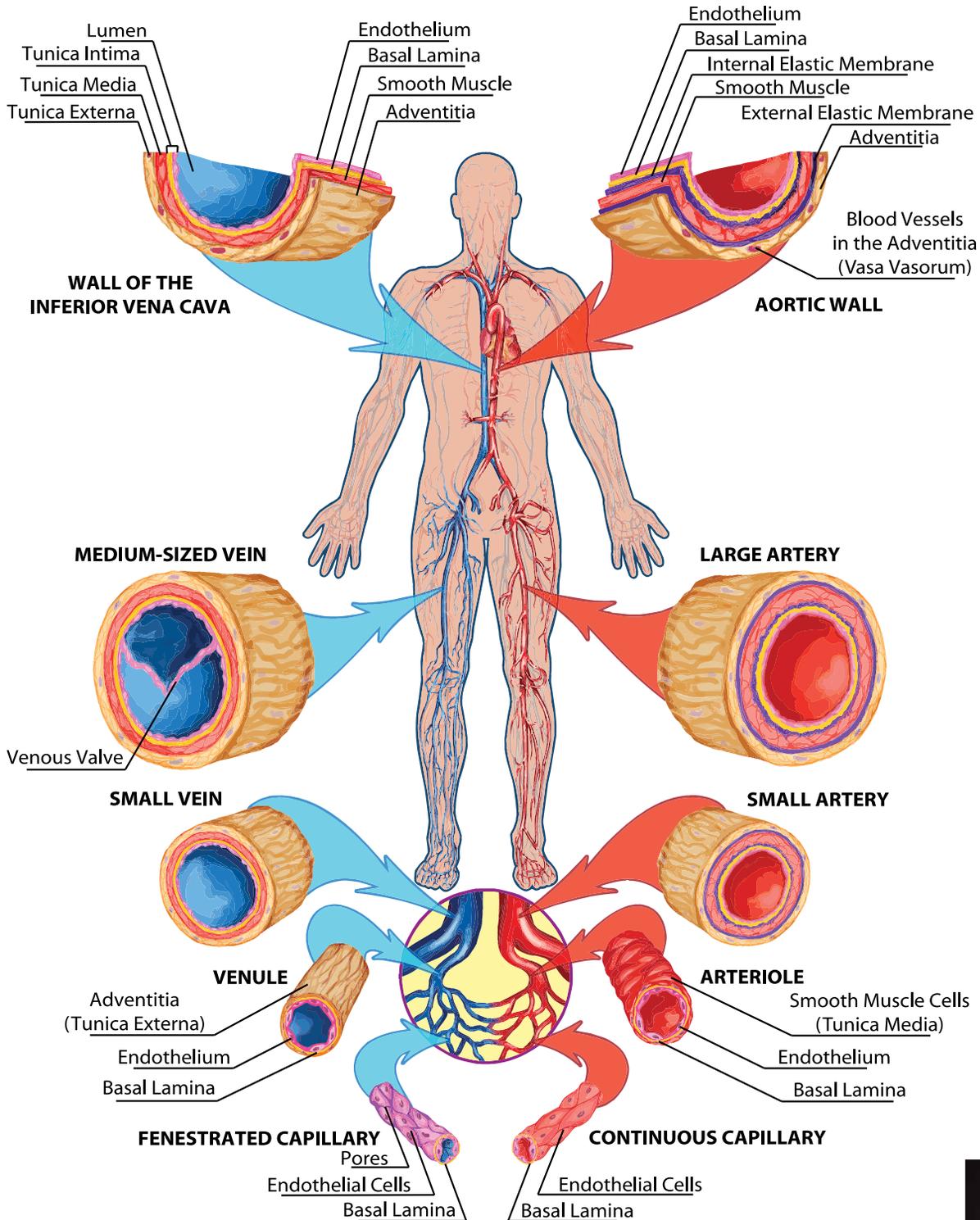
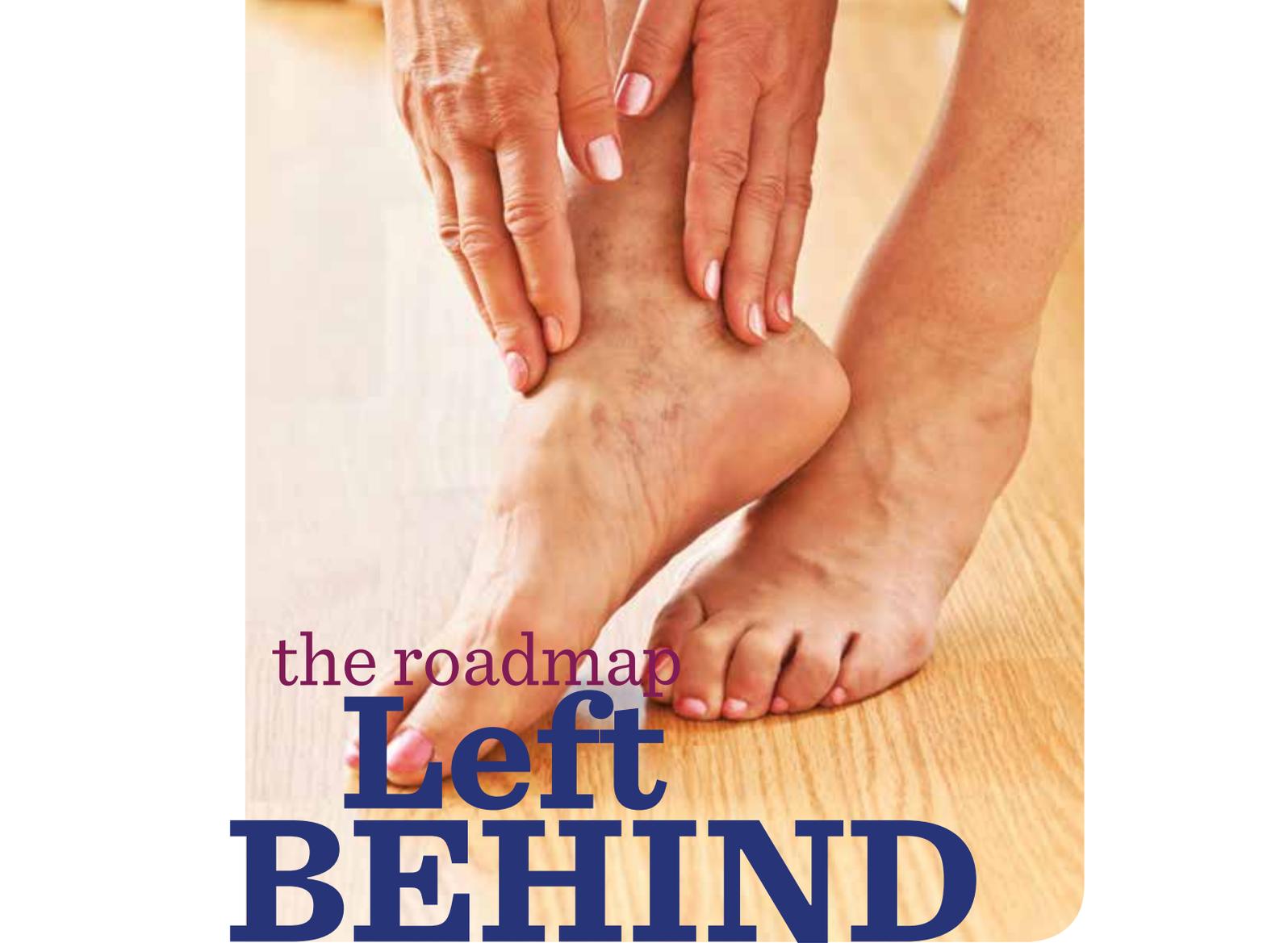




our Amazing ANATOMY





the roadmap Left BEHIND

words | TINA JOYCE

Remember road trips to the coast? Anticipation, excitement and planning filled the house for weeks prior to the big day. Jeans and fleece were eagerly pushed to the back of the closet while lightweight t-shirts, cotton shorts and swimsuits were carefully escorted to suitcases.

Packing the car initiated the first day of summer vacation. A red and white cooler was jam-packed tight with drinks and snacks—special treats made available only for road trips. The trunk was filled with over-stuffed luggage, brightly colored towels and themed boogie boards.

There was always a scramble, and an argument or two, as the family unplugged the toaster and double-checked the door locks. The first five minutes of every trip was merely a roll call of items not to forget, and to re-address car etiquette among the back seat passengers.

Mom sat in the front passenger seat wearing new sunglasses with the tattered atlas open on her lap. She carefully traced the well-planned route with her freshly painted nails. There was no GPS or Google Maps back then. The trusted roadmap showed it's age, but gave clear direction to the destination. Twisting blue lines specified interstates, while red indicated highways.

Once arriving, the cool breeze rolled off the ocean waters and slid upon the warm shoreline, creating the perfect temperature for evening walks. The smell of seawater filled the air with a distinct, memorable scent, inviting everyone to stay outside just a little longer.

While most people embraced summer's invitation to show off bare legs and sun-kissed skin, mom always kept her legs covered. Linen pants, cropped slacks and long cover-ups were a discrete way to hide what she didn't want to share with the world.

Many women and men, find themselves avoiding strolls at the water's edge, attending summer pool parties and buying the trendiest summer fashions because of a lack of confidence—due to awful-looking, often painful, varicose veins.

This was also true for Debbie McElroy of Blacksburg, Virginia.

Debbie first noticed a bulging vein on her shin during her first pregnancy. "At first it was just one. Then, after my pregnancy, it was better. But, by the time I was pregnant with our fourth child, I had noticeable veins all over my legs and they [the varicose veins] were very painful. I had to wear support stockings while I was pregnant," she explains.

Even after Debbie delivered their son, the veins did not go away. Each night her legs would swell and ache. She admits lying down did provide some relief. However, as a mother of four small children, staying in bed was not a feasible option.

She, like many who suffer from varicose veins, became very self-conscious. "I would never wear shorts, other than at home, and rarely put on Capri pants and sandals. My legs literally looked like a roadmap," admits Debbie.

Eager to bring relief from the pain, Debbie committed to an intense workout plan to drop any residual baby weight and improve circulation. She made the lifestyle changes necessary to improve her condition, and found herself in great shape at age 40—and 20 pounds lighter. However, she was still extremely uncomfortable, and very self-conscious, from the aching and swelling veins. Her husband encouraged her to seek options to treat her varicose veins.

The facts.

Approximately 30 million Americans suffer from venous disease, including varicose veins.¹ Varicose veins are swollen, twisted or enlarged veins just below the skin's surface; often blue or red in color and are caused by an underlying venous disease called Chronic Venous Insufficiency (CVI). If left untreated, varicose veins can progress to more serious problems including skin damage, swelling, severe pain and ulcers.

Veins become varicose due to venous insufficiency, or improperly functioning vein valves. The Vascular Disease Foundation explains that vein valves may fail to close properly due to wall weakness, causing the vein to enlarge and the valves to leak. This can be due to a history of blood clots in the vein, causing damage to the valves, or an absence of vein valves since birth.

What is venous insufficiency and venous reflux disease?

Veins in the human body provide the important function of returning blood back to the heart. In healthy veins, valves prevent back flow of the blood and allow the blood to continuously travel from extremities back to the heart against gravity.

However, venous insufficiency (or venous reflux disease) occurs when a blood flow in a vein is obstructed due to a blood clot or damaged valve. This failure then leads to backward flow (reflux) of blood in the veins, creating pressure and pooling of blood. The increased pressure causes surface veins to widen or dilate (varicose).

Symptoms may include:

- Leg pain, aching, or cramping
- Restless legs
- Leg or ankle swelling
- Varicose Veins
- Burning or itching of the skin
- Heavy feeling in legs
- Skin discoloration or texture changes
- Open wounds or sores

Who is at risk?

Varicose veins can be hereditary, often occurring in several members of the same family. Other factors leading to the development of varicose veins may include:

- Prolonged standing
- Increasing age
- Heavy lifting
- Prior blood clots in superficial or deep veins
- Multiple pregnancies
- Limited physical activity
- High blood pressure
- Obesity

The term varicose simply means dilated or twisted. Varicose veins affect 72% of American women and 43% of American men.² These bulging, painful veins occur most often in the legs, but may appear in other areas of the body, and worsen with time if left untreated.

Debbie completed an application at the Cosmetic Vein Center of Virginia in Blacksburg, but never returned it to the office. “Life happened and I was busy taking care of everybody else. I put it off for almost a year,” she recalls.

Finally, on April 3, 2013, she returned the application and scheduled a consultation. “Everybody there [Cosmetic Vein Center] was so kind,” Debbie remembers. “When I first met with Dr. Purpera, he said, ‘No wonder you are so uncomfortable.’”

The diagnosis.

The diagnosis of varicose veins is initially made through a physical examination. However, the most thorough test is an ultrasound diagnosis, which can easily determine the source of reflux to decide the best restorative options. Treatments vary depending on the severity of a patient’s condition. A physician, trained in vascular procedures, may suggest conservative treatments to help alleviate symptoms or more aggressive procedures aimed to cure the condition.

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Conservative treatments include leg elevation several times a day, or wearing compression stockings. However, these options rely heavily on a patient's commitment or desired comfort, and may also interfere with an active lifestyle.

For patients with severe venous insufficiency, who are looking for permanent results, more aggressive treatments may be recommended. Treatments include surgical options such as vein stripping and ligation, or non-surgical options such as endovenous ablation (Gold Standard), radiofrequency (VNUS) or laser removal.

Outpatient procedure.

Dr. Frank Purpera, MD, the Director of the Cosmetic Vein Center of Virginia, often recommends a minimally invasive treatment alternative, known as the VNUS Closure™ Procedure to patients with symptomatic superficial venous reflux, resulting in varicose veins.

This particular procedure uses a catheter-based approach. After insertion of a small needle, the VNUS generator delivers radiofrequency (RF) waves to the catheter to heat the vein wall along a 7-centimeter segment to contract the vein wall collagen. The heat generated causes the veins to collapse. Then, over time, the body eventually absorbs the vein.

Dr. Purpera provides both of the FDA approved non-invasive vein procedures, laser and VNUS closure, in his Blacksburg office. "I've been able to do a side-by-side comparison [of the two treatments]. Compared to the laser, the VNUS procedure is significantly more tolerable (less pain, bruising, swelling) for the patients, as it uses 1/10th the energy and has the same effectiveness (98%) of closing the affected vein," he explains.

"Anybody who has CVI, the underlying cause for restless legs, varicose veins, and venous ulcers, would be a good candidate for the procedure."

The roadmap.

Debbie sought Dr. Purpera's expertise in reducing her roadmap of varicose veins, and scheduled her first appointment on April 23, 2013. She experienced a couple of different office procedures to eliminate multiple veins.

"Once we started, I wanted to hurry and finish. They bruised a little, but it was so much better instantly. I had improvement in the way my legs felt immediately," she revealed. The cleanliness of the center also impressed Debbie saying, "Dr. Purpera's team was very timely and efficient. My appointments only lasted about 30 minutes, and the office was very clean."

Debbie holds a Master's Degree in Exercise Physiology, with a minor in Cardiac Rehabilitation. Therefore, she has a concrete understanding of the circulatory system and the importance of



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*“I cannot wait to go to the beach this year! My family cannot get over how great my legs look; I love how they feel!”
Debbie marvels.*

post-procedure care. “I really don’t think people realize the condition will get worse over time,” she says. “I wish I would have had the treatments when I first completed my application.”

The VNUS procedure Dr. Purpera recommends is quick and uneventful. Since the procedures are medically necessary to prevent worsening, most insurance providers cover treatments - including Medicare and Medicaid.

“I truly enjoy the fact that we can get such dramatic results through one small needle insertion. There’s no incision, or any noticeable scarring. There is zero downtime, so our patients can immediately resume normal activity. They find great relief from their symptoms—swelling, cramping and restless legs, improving their quality of life,” shares Dr. Purpera.

Technological advancements allow us to leave behind the aged, folded roadmap, while modern technology also gives many the freedom to live without painful, unattractive bulging veins. Men and women no longer need to suffer from CVI. Treatments are relatively painless and very effective.

Patients, like Debbie, can now look forward to family trips to the water’s edge. They can wear the latest summer fashions, including shorts and skirts, leaving behind the unsightly map of varicose veins.

Sources:

¹ *Gloviczki, P, MD., Comerota, A., MD., Dalsing, M., MD., Eklof, B., MD., Gillespie, D., MD., Gloviczki, M., MD., Wakefield, T., MD. The care of patients with varicose veins and associated chronic venous diseases: Clinical practice guidelines of the Society for Vascular Surgery and the American Venous Forum. J Vasc Surg. 2011 May; 53(5 Suppl): 2S-48S.*

² *Barron HC, Ross BA. Varicose Veins: A guide to prevention and treatment. NY, NY: Facts on File, Inc. (An Infobase Holdings Company); 1995:vii.*

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