How to treat it?

- Rest — Dull ache and swelling of the lower limbs can often be relieved with periodic resting and leg elevation.

- Compression therapy — Wearing elastic stocking or applying elastic bandage to the affected lower limb can increase its venous blood return.

- Injection treatment — Injection of sclerosant to obliterate the dilated veins.

- Surgery — If severe, the involved veins can be removed by stripping, excision or ligation.

Conclusion
Lower limb varicose vein is a “work-related disease”. Although work is only one of the many risk factors in the development of the disease, the chance of getting this disease can be minimized by eliminating the health hazards at work, reducing the associated risks, and adopting appropriate preventive measures.

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Enquiries
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Information on the services offered by the Labour Department and on major labour legislation can also be found on our website: www.labour.gov.hk

Complaints
If you have any complaints about unsafe workplace and practices, please call the Labour Department’s Occupational Safety and Health Complaint Hotline at 2542 2172. All complaints will be treated in the strictest confidence.
Introduction

Work and health are closely related. While our work could affect our health, our health could also affect our work. According to the International Labour Organization, the relationship between work and disease can be classified into the following three categories:

1. Occupational diseases – have specific or strong relationship to the exposure to physical, chemical, biological or psychosocial factors in the workplace. These factors in the work environment are predominant and essential in the causation of the diseases, for example, silicosis, asbestos, occupational deafness, etc.

2. Work-related diseases – are multifactorial in origin, where factors in the work environment may play a role, together with other risk factors, in the development of such diseases, for example, plantar fasciitis, lower limb varicose vein, frozen shoulder, etc.

3. General diseases – are diseases affecting the working population. They do not have causal relationship with work but may be aggravated by occupational health hazards, for example, diabetes mellitus, gout, rheumatoid arthritis, etc.

This pamphlet introduces lower limb varicose veins which is a common "work-related disease".

What is lower limb varicose vein?

It presents as dilated, tortuous and swollen veins over the lower limbs. It is mainly due to defective function of the valves of the veins or intrinsic weakness of the venous wall.

Causes

- Personal factors e.g. pregnancy, overweight, gender (more common in females)
- Family history of varicose veins
- Prolonged standing or sitting that increases the venous pressure in the lower limbs
- Other factors e.g. as a complication of thrombophlebitis of the lower limbs

Symptoms and signs

- Dilated veins over the lower limbs without any symptom initially
- Skin thickness of the affected areas, heavy sensation and dull ache of the affected leg, ankle swelling
- Complications such as scarring, bleeding and ulceration in the affected areas in severe cases

Which occupations have a higher risk?

Sales personnel, cook, teacher and nurse etc.

How to prevent it?

1. Avoid standing at work or prolonged walking
   - Arrange intermittent sitting for employees, such as 10-15 minutes break for 2-hour continuous standing work or perform lower limb exercises.
   - Move around after prolonged sitting or standing to enhance venous blood return from the lower limbs.
   - Flexible work arrangement allows employees to relieve lower limbs fatigue

2. Reduce pressure in the lower limbs
   - Maintain desirable body weight
   - As far as reasonably practicable, provide a suitable work chair or a chair for occasional sitting at the working location for the employee standing at work.
   - If your work requires prolonged standing, shift your weight from one leg to the other from time to time, or rest your legs alternately on foot-rest or foot-rest
   - Shock absorbent mat could be used

3. Suitable exercises

First Series
   - Sit properly with your feet on the floor.
   - Straighten your right leg and keep it at the horizontal level.
   - Move the right foot back and forth 5 times
   - Repeat the above movements with the left leg.

Second Series
   - Raise one leg while sitting, rotate your foot outward 10 times
   - Then rotate your foot inward 10 times
   - Repeat the above movements with the other leg