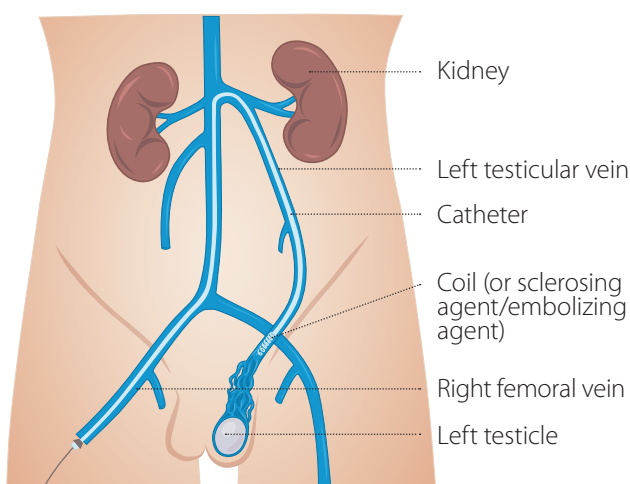


Venous embolization for varicocele

Veins are the blood vessels that bring blood from a part of the body back to the heart. Veins have valves that make sure that the blood keeps moving towards the heart. If the valves don't work properly, the blood sits in the vein and makes it bulge, like varicose veins in the leg.

If the valves in the veins of the scrotum (the sac containing the testes) do not work properly, the blood doesn't flow out of the veins normally and causes them to become bigger and bulge under the skin. Many men report that this makes the scrotum feel like a bag of worms.

Medically, these bulging veins are called varicoceles. Some men with varicoceles feel a dull ache in the scrotum that gets worse when standing. Varicoceles can also decrease the quality of a man's sperm and increase the chances of him being infertile.



Varicocele

What are the benefits of venous embolization for varicoceles?

Varicocele embolization is a minimally invasive treatment that avoids open surgery. Embolization also offers quicker recovery times, with most patients returning to normal activities within a few hours or days. The procedure can relieve symptoms such as pain or discomfort caused by the varicoceles and can also improve fertility.

How do I prepare for the procedure?

To prepare for varicocele embolization, it is important to tell your doctor about any allergies and to follow your doctor's instructions about eating and drinking, as you may need to fast before the procedure. Inform your doctor about any medications you are taking, especially blood thinners, as these may need to be stopped for a short time beforehand.

The procedure

The varicocele embolization procedure will block the abnormal veins and relieve your symptoms. The interventional radiologist will numb your skin with local anaesthetic and will then pass a tiny tube called a catheter into a vein in the arm, neck, or upper thigh. X-rays will help the interventional radiologist to guide the tube into the veins coming from the scrotum. X-ray contrast (dye) will be injected to show the veins clearly on screen. The clinician will then block the veins with coils, foam, or other materials that are put in through the same tiny tube.

When the procedure is done, the interventional radiologist will remove the catheter and a small dressing will be put on the puncture site. In total, the procedure usually takes around an hour or less to complete.

You should be able to return home within 2 to 4 hours after the procedure. You will be advised not to do anything that takes a lot of effort, like heavy lifting, for two days, after which you will be able to return to your normal activities. Your doctor may ask you not to have sex for 2-3 weeks. You may feel some discomfort for a few days after the procedure, but this should be minor.

What are the risks?

Varicocele embolization is generally a safe and effective procedure when performed by a fully trained specialist; however, like any medical treatment, there are some risks.

Less than 4 out of 100 patients who undergo the procedure will have minor bleeding, minor infections, or temporary pain or swelling in the scrotum or testes. In very rare cases, the glue or coils may move to other areas of the body. If this happens, the interventional radiologist will try to remove them from the other part of the body.

Always follow your doctor's advice and let them know if you have concerns or unusual symptoms after the procedure.

What is the follow-up plan?

After varicocele embolization, your follow-up plan will probably include a clinic visit and an ultrasound to assess your recovery and to make sure that the procedure was successful.

Varicoceles can come back in 5-10% of patients even after a successful embolization. This is similar to the number that return after surgical procedures. If the varicocele does come back, embolization can be repeated.

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