

HEALTH & WELL-BEING

VARICOSE VEINS

Let the singing surgeon help

About the author

Barbara Ravage moved to Cape Cod from her native New York City in 2000, after the youngest of her children went off to college. She considers heavy doses of ocean air and Cape light the best cure for empty nest syndrome.

A graduate of Barnard College, she is the author of nine books, including a biography of Rachel Carson for middle-school students and "Burn Unit: Saving Lives After the Flames," which explores the history and science of burn treatment.

She balances her writing life with yoga, karate, and pottery. After years of making do with two summer weeks on the Cape, her favorite part about living here is that she's already home.



Dr. Dan Gorin of Southeastern Surgical Associates in Hyannis specializes in a quick, painless and highly successful treatment for varicose veins. He's known as the singing surgeon for his melodious contributions to an a cappella group.

RON SCHLOERB/CAPE COD TIMES

BY BARBARA RAVAGE

When he isn't singing a cappella, Daniel Gorin, MD, is singing the praises of a quick, painless, and effective treatment for varicose veins. The 46-year-old vascular surgeon specializes in a minimally invasive technique that has his patients back on their feet in less than an hour.

Perhaps you've noticed with dismay the unsightly bulging veins tracing their tortured squiggles and knots on your lower legs. You may have felt their effects: itching, fatigue and the sort of heaviness in your legs that makes you want to put your feet up. They make you look old, they make you feel old. You wish they would

just go away.

Varicose veins are an abnormality of the superficial veins in the legs, most commonly the long saphenous vein, which runs from the top of the foot or the side of the ankle, across the inside of the leg all the way up to the groin, where it drains into the deep veins. "Veins in the legs all have one-way valves designed to get blood out of the legs and back to the heart," Dan Gorin explains. Because the blood flows against gravity on its upward journey, the valves are needed to push it along and prevent backflow. Over time, the veins stretch out, due to age, overweight, and occupations that require standing for long stretches of time. For women, hormonal and other changes

in pregnancy are further contributing factors. Whatever the cause, the result is varicose veins, which affect women twice as often as men and also tend to run in families.

"The valves pull apart and they leak, so when you stand up, the blood goes backwards down the veins and sits there. You basically walk around with these big, tense bags of blood hanging off your legs, and by the end of the day your legs feel heavy and achy and tired and uncomfortable," Dan says.

There are things people suffering from varicose veins can do to relieve the discomfort: losing weight, exercising, elevating the legs when resting and not crossing them when sitting,

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Varicose

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wearing elastic support stockings, and avoiding long periods of standing. None of these strategies will make them go away, however. Although there’s some research being done in mice, there is currently no way to replace the damaged valves or repair the weak-walled veins.

If you remember the old “vein stripping” operation, which left patients with bruises and railroad-track scars, you have probably dismissed the idea of varicose vein surgery. After all, Dan says, “You looked like somebody hit you with a bat, you limped around for three or four weeks before it got better, and it did leave you with some unsightly scars as well. A lot of people said ‘I don’t want to go through that.’” That’s all in the past, thanks to endovenous radio-frequency ablation, a surgical technique Dan has been using since 2001. He estimates he’s done “several thousand” RF ablations. He lectures and trains other physicians in the procedure.

Dan calls it “band-aid surgery.” He performs it on an outpatient basis at Southeastern Surgical Associates in Hyannis. “We give you a prescription for a Valium tablet, which doesn’t put you to sleep but just makes sure you’re not nervous. You can eat and drink normally beforehand. You come a half an hour before the procedure, which takes another half hour-ish, then we wrap you up with an Ace bandage just to make sure you don’t have any bleeding from the little puncture site we make, and tell you to go home and kick your feet up. The next day you can do anything you want except we ask you to avoid any real high impact stuff, if you do aerobics, until we see you a week later for a follow-up ultrasound. There’s no pain medicine needed. Anybody who needs anything takes a little Tylenol.”

The procedure involves using a needle to insert a thin flexible tube called a catheter through skin numbed with a local anesthetic. Guided by

an ultrasound image, the catheter is threaded through the entire length of the damaged vein. A tiny probe at the end of the catheter emits heat, collapsing the vein and sealing it as the tube is withdrawn. That essentially puts the vein out of business. Over time, it dissolves and is absorbed by surrounding tissue.

Surprisingly, the veins involved are ones we can do without. The deep veins are important to circulation, but the superficial ones close to the skin are not. In fact, the saphenous vein is the one commonly removed for use in coronary bypass surgery. “You can take it out and people have perfectly normal circulation in their legs,” Dan says. Patients contemplating varicose vein surgery often ask him whether

it wouldn’t be better to leave things be in case the saphenous is needed someday to fix their heart. “The answer is no. It wouldn’t be useful for a bypass anyway because it’s all stretched out and balloony and the valves aren’t working.”

Dan knows a lot about the blood vessels surrounding the heart and elsewhere in the body, not just those in the legs. He also repairs aneurysms and performs bypass surgery, and he spends one day a week in the cardiac catheterization lab at Cape Cod Hospital doing

angioplasties and other cardiovascular interventions. After graduating from Bowdoin College, he spent 10 years at the University of Connecticut Medical School, first getting his MD and then serving a general surgery residency there. He went on to Boston University Medical Center for a two-year vascular fellowship. He’s also a registered vascular technician (RVT), specially trained and certified to do vascular ultrasonography, a technique for viewing the blood vessels, which has become an essential diagnostic and surgical tool. He began practicing medicine in New Hampshire in 1996, but when he learned of an opening for a vascular surgeon at Cape Cod Hospital, he moved his medical practice and his family to the Cape.

Over time, the veins stretch out, due to age, overweight, and occupations that require standing for long stretches of time.

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The Gorins have lived in Centerville since 2000. His wife, Lisa, who worked as a nurse and a clinical diabetes educator in Hartford, was finishing up a master's degree in public health when the twins, Drew and Ali (for Alison), were born. Now 14, they have an 11-year-old brother, Josh. Dan echoes many who are drawn to the Cape: "We spend the summer on the water, sailing, fishing. It's a great place to have a family, a great community."

Once a week, Dan goes off-Cape to rehearse with The Works, the six-member a cappella group he's been singing tenor with since 1994. Named after the Cambridge Department of Public Works, the group sings what Dan refers to as "modern a cappella," a mixture of Motown, jazz, rock, folk, and pop. They are hired to entertain at conventions and other events. "Our last gig was at the Myopia Hunt Club on the North Shore," Dan says, but the one he recalls with great fondness was an ongoing appearance at TechLearn, an electronic learning convention held at Disney World. For four years running, they brought along their families and sang as the opening act for such luminaries as Jack Welch and Bill Cosby. They won third place in the Harmony Sweepstakes, a national competition. "We were beaten by two professional groups," he says with a broad smile. Dan is the only doctor among the four men and two women in the group. "It's a bunch of very smart, talented people I get to hang out with every week. And we don't sit around and talk shop."

Not that he doesn't like talking about varicose veins and RF ablation. The man clearly loves his work. "Veins are just a part of what I do, but everything else is in the midst of a traumatic circumstance for somebody, not the sort of thing that people will look back fondly on. We get to come in and help and that's wonderful, but it's scary stuff. This is different. It's not life threatening, but it's a nuisance, something that really bothers people. I can do a minor thing with minimal discomfort and minimal disruption of their life, and they come back and say, 'My leg feels great.' They're my happiest patients."

Quickhits

Tired of your veins?

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For more information about varicose veins, radiofrequency ablation, and other treatment options: MedlinePlus, from the National Library of Medicine/National Institutes of Health
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/varicoseveins.html

Quizanswers

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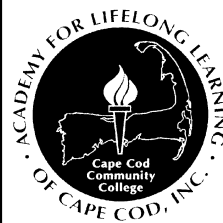
1. "Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First Hundred Years," written with Amy Hill Hearth. Published in 1991, the book also told the history of the African-American civil rights struggle as they lived and observed it. The sisters died at age 109 and 104 respectively.

2. Rose Kennedy, who, at 104, outlived four of her nine children, one of her grandchildren, and her celebrated daughter-in-law, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis.

3. George Burns, whose honors included a Supporting Actor Oscar. He published ten books, the last in 1996, called "100 Years, 100 Stories." His wife and partner, Gracie Allen, died in 1964.

4. "Triumph of the Will." Her friendship with Adolph Hitler and Joseph Goebbels caused her to be arrested for war crimes after the Allied victory over Germany, but she was never charged.

5. The Sopwith Camel.



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