

Real SOLUTIONS

to Common Leg and Foot PROBLEMS

By KATIE MARKEY MCLAUGHLIN

Maybe you're tired of the pain in your feet keeping you away from the gym. Or maybe you wish your toes looked nicer in sandals or your legs looked smoother in a pencil skirt.

Here are some of the most common foot and leg problems women face, plus doctor-recommended solutions to get your lower half back into tiptop shape.

Plantar Fasciitis

What is it?

Plantar fasciitis is an inflammation of the bottom of your foot that causes significant heel pain, especially during your first steps out of bed or after sitting for a long time.

Treatment Options

For many people, plantar fasciitis is caused by an incorrect gait pattern. According to Dr. Allan B. Grossman of Harrisburg Foot and Ankle Center, "it's about re-education of how to roll off the foot when you walk." Your doctor might recommend splints to wear at night or steroid shots in your heel to help alleviate the pain.

Surgery is a treatment of last resort, and about 95 percent of people who have plantar fasciitis are able to relieve heel pain without surgery.

Stress Fractures

What are they?

Stress fractures are small cracks in your bones—usually in weight-bearing ones such as those in your feet—and are often caused by high-impact activities like distance running. They are characterized by swelling and tenderness in the middle of your foot.

Treatment Options

Depending on the severity of the fracture, your doctor might recommend a combination of rest, protective footwear while the fractures heal, and—in rare cases—surgery.

To prevent stress fractures, Grossman emphasizes the importance of not doing too much activity too soon.

"When you start a new activity [such as running], you have to do it methodically," he explained. "Too many people make the mistake of overtraining."

Bunions

What are they?

Bunions are bony bumps that form on the joint at the base of your big toe, often causing your big toe to point toward your second one.

For many people they are hereditary, and Grossman explains that while they aren't caused by pointy shoes—as is often believed—ill-fitting shoes can exacerbate them.

"If you wear shoes that don't fit appropriately," he said, "that won't cause the bunion, but it will irritate it or increase the progression of it."

Treatment Options

At-home remedies for bunions include shoe inserts, nonprescription pain medicine, and icing the area to relieve swelling. If the pain is affecting your day-to-day activities, there are surgical treatments available.

"You want to address a bunion as soon as you can," explained Grossman. "The longer you wait, the worse it will get."

Morton's Neuroma

What is it?

Morton's neuroma is a nerve condition that causes pain on the ball of your foot between your third and fourth toes. People with this condition often feel like they have a stone in their shoe.

Treatment Options

Avoiding sky-high heels is the first step. Grossman's patients often find complete relief just by switching to flat, properly fitting shoes. Shoe pads, steroid injections, and surgery could



Dr. Allan B. Grossman of Harrisburg Foot and Ankle Center stresses the importance of proper-fitting shoes to give the foot support and to prevent injuries or foot problems.



Antifungal nail polish is an effective treatment for nail fungus with an added benefit of making your nails attractive.

also be recommended, but only if the pain remains even after changing shoes.

Toenail Fungus

What is it?

Fungal infections underneath the toenails are relatively common, and they can span the range from thin and superficial to thick and very deep. Toenail fungus may cause your nail to discolor or develop ragged, crumbly edges—certainly not ideal for walking around in summer sandals.

There is a hereditary component to toenail fungus, and people who perspire a lot can have a propensity to get it, since fungi thrive in dark, moist environments like the inside of your shoes.

Treatment Options

There are oral and topical medications available for some strains of toenail fungus, but repeat occurrences are still likely. For mild to moderate cases your doctor might prescribe an antifungal nail polish.

Dr. Heird uses the VeinViewer Vision device to view a vein subdermally, which will enable him to effectively treat that vein.

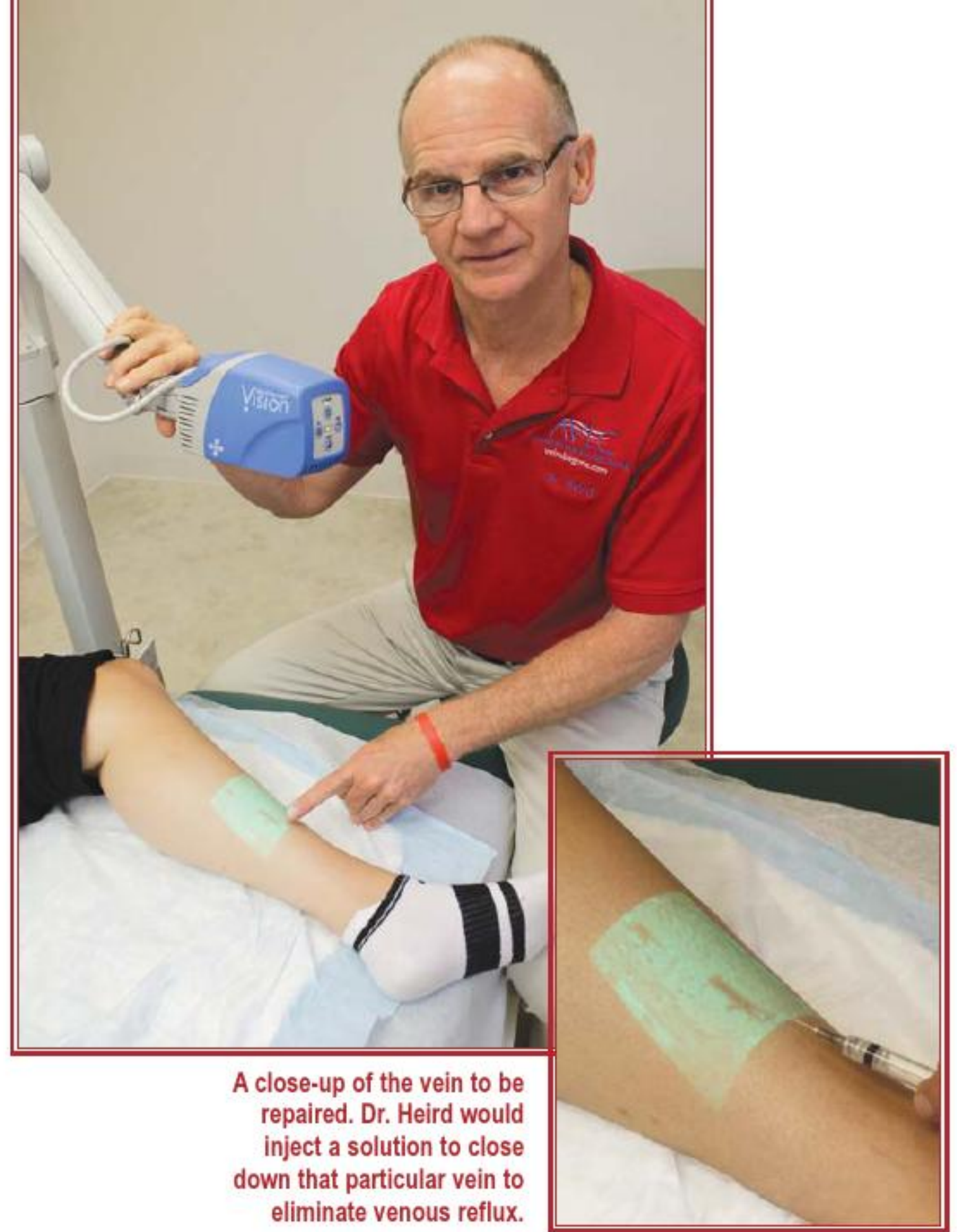
“For summer it’s a great solution,” said Grossman. “You’re treating the infection in a cosmetically appealing way.”

Laser treatments for toenail fungus are also gaining popularity, but Grossman noted that it can take six to 12 months until you can tell if the treatments worked. One treatment often isn’t enough, and it can be an expensive option that is usually not covered by insurance.

Varicose Veins

What are they?

When the valves in your legs aren’t functioning properly, it causes blood to pool in your veins, which results in the bulgy, ropey appearance of varicose veins.



A close-up of the vein to be repaired. Dr. Heird would inject a solution to close down that particular vein to eliminate venous reflux.

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Women are much more likely to get them than men, and they can be caused by heredity, prolonged sitting, or prolonged standing. Other symptoms include tired, achy legs and swelling.

According to Dr. Steven B. Heird of the Advanced Laser and Vein Center—which has offices in York and Altoona—it's important to remember that vein conditions aren't just aesthetic issues.

"Many women are surprised to learn that there is a medical issue causing their vein conditions," he remarked. "What you see on the surface is often only 10 percent of the problem."

Treatment Options

The good news is that treatment doesn't have to mean a hospital stay or long recovery. A variety of treatment options "can be done in the comfort of our office with no downtime," Heird said. "A comprehensive treatment plan can be put together based on a woman's specific condition."

Possible treatments include sclerotherapy, which involves injecting the veins with a foaming solution to close them; phlebectomy, in which smaller varicose veins are removed via tiny skin punctures, which results in minimal scarring; and light treatment, which involves no incisions or needles at all.

Spider Veins

What are they?

Contrary to popular belief, spider veins—so named because

they can be seen through the skin and often look like spider legs—are not simply early-stage varicose veins.

"Spider veins are a result of valve dysfunction at a microscopic level," explained Heird. "They are typically not painful and have no symptoms, though an itchy, burning sensation may occur."

Treatment Options

As with varicose veins, there are a variety of treatment options—such as the foaming solution and light treatment mentioned previously—that are simple outpatient procedures.

Treatment will depend on if the condition is solely cosmetic or a symptom of a medical issue.

"We are seeing many women come in with spider vein concerns, and upon further examination, discover that there are underlying venous issues," said Heird. A vein specialist can determine if your spider veins are a medical concern.

While prevention of vein conditions isn't always possible because of the hereditary component, there are some steps you can take to keep your veins healthy, such as maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly, and avoiding prolonged sitting and standing.

Whatever condition you're facing, there are solutions available to help you get the healthy legs and feet you've been wanting. **BV**

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