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**T**he late comedienne-writer, Erma Bombeck, used to joke about painting other parts of her legs to look like her varicose veins and passing them off as textured stockings. That was always good for a laugh, but anyone who has suffered from varicose veins knows they are no laughing matter.

Varicose veins are caused by superficial venous reflux, or SVF. This is a condition that develops when the valves, which usually keep blood flowing from the legs back to the heart, become damaged or diseased, causing blood to pool in the legs. Pain, swelling, leg heaviness, fatigue, itching, and other symptoms are the result. Veins can also bulge, twist, and stand out visibly. Sometimes ulcers form on the skin over the top of the veins.

Certain risk factors make them more likely to occur. It can run in families, and women may develop them during pregnancy. A job that requires a lot of standing or sitting, lack of exercise, injury (trauma), and hormonal changes can bring them on as well.

Self-help steps include exercise and compression stockings. Exercise is very important. When calf and thigh muscles move, they move blood upward. Compression stockings are also important as they exert more pressure at the ankle than at the top of the leg. This helps move the blood upward and prevent pooling. Stockings come in a variety of pressures and sizes, but you should check with your doctor before using them.

If you sit at a job most of the day, or are on a long flight, you should take short walk breaks. Even wiggling the toes, flexing leg muscles, or standing on tiptoe work the leg muscles and help keep blood flowing. Elevating the legs above the heart for 15 minutes two to three times a day, if possible, allows gravity to move the blood back toward the heart.

Erma Bombeck also joked that she didn't get varicose veins in her neck from whispering to her teenagers. Brochures on SVF state that most varicose veins occur in the legs. Maybe Erma was just kidding?

Dr. Christopher C. Peters, medical doctor and owner of Iowa City Vein Clinic, and his wife, Julie Peters, registered nurse, both work out of their clinic at 540 E. Jefferson, Suite 304, in Iowa City. Lori Fuller, physician's assistant, and Tammy Watson, receptionist, are also part of the Iowa City Vein Clinic team.

Dr. Peters is affiliated with Dr. James Wright with the Iowa City Cardiovascular Surgery practice, where he performs peripheral vascular surgery. He concentrates more on venous procedures than Dr. Wright does. Vascular and venous complications are not related, but can occur in the same patient. Both doctors are licensed cardiovascular and thoracic surgeons, and Dr. Peters also has surgery privileges at Mercy in Waterloo and some outlying areas. Almost all patients of the Vein Clinic are treated at the clinic, however.

In the recent past, varicose veins were often treated by stripping the veins but now there is a much less invasive and quicker-healing procedure known as Closure®. After an initial

examination in which ultrasound (the mainstay of venous diagnosis) is used to determine the extent of the problem and rule out certain conditions like deep vein clots, Dr. Peters may recommend Closure. After the appropriate local anesthetic is administered, he punctures the vein with a needle and inserts a catheter inside the vein. Ultrasound is used to guide the catheter to the proper place inside the vein. Then the catheter is drawn slowly backward, heating the vein tissue and closing off the vein behind it. Closed-off veins are absorbed by the body over time, and other, better-functioning veins take over carrying the blood back to the heart.

Patients return home soon after the procedure and usually resume normal activities in one or two days. Their leg(s) may feel better immediately or after a week or two. Because these malfunctioning veins usually produce both functional and cosmetic consequences, insurance plans normally cover the procedure.

Dr. Peters said it's very gratifying to hear patients—including those athletically inclined—week after week tell him how much better their legs feel and look, and that they can walk or run without their previous pain or fatigue. They also have a better self-image when wearing shorts, swimming suits/trunks or skirts. He said he is very pleased to have patients tell him and others on his staff that they find Iowa City Vein Clinic's team personable and willing to spend the time required with each patient.

Dr. Peters didn't always want to be a doctor. His father was an architect, which is what he thought he would be, but life's path led him in different directions. He was born and raised in Lawrence, Kansas. In college he started out in psychology, then changed his major to biology with a pre-med emphasis. He joined the U.S. Army for a scholarship to help with his education, and completed his general surgery residency at Tripler Army Medical Center in Honolulu, Hawaii (where he met his wife).

He completed a thoracic surgery residency at the University of Oklahoma, spent four years at Fort Stewart in Georgia, and then lived and practiced in Colorado and Indiana.

So how did he end up in Iowa City, Iowa?

"Well, I am a Midwesterner and Julie's family still lives up by Whittimore, Iowa," he said. "Most of all, my colleague, Dr. Wright, made me an interesting offer to practice with him, so here we are."

Does Dr. Peters think either of his children will follow in his or his wife's footsteps? He chuckled at the thought. He had visited his 9-year-old's class recently to talk about his work and took along a pig's heart, which intrigued all the children. Although his children examined it more closely at home and asked questions, he said, "Who knows? Maybe one will become an architect and complete the full circle."

For further information, call or stop in at Iowa City Vein Clinic next to Mercy Hospital Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Call (319) 339-8346, or visit [www.ICVein.com](http://www.ICVein.com) for more information.

## IOWA CITY VEIN CLINIC

By Beverly Haesy Hannon



Dr. Christopher C. Peters, MD, Owner of  
Iowa City Vein Clinic

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