Chronic Venous Insufficiency

Chronic venous insufficiency (CVI) can occur after excessive clotting and inflammation of the leg veins, a disease known as deep vein thrombosis. CVI also results from a simple failure of the valves in leg veins to hold blood against gravity, leading to sluggish movement of blood out of the veins. It can cause feet and calves to become swollen, often accompanied by a dull ache made worse with prolonged standing. If CVI is allowed to progress, the skin tends to darken and ulcers can occur. CVI often causes varicose veins.

**Lifestyle changes that may be helpful:** People affected by chronic venous insufficiency should not sit or stand for long periods of time and when sitting should elevate their legs. Walking helps move blood out of the veins. Wearing tight-fitting compression stockings available from pharmacies further supports the veins.

**Nutritional supplements that may be helpful:** Bioflavonoids promote venous strength and integrity. Most studies of bioflavonoids in patients with CVI have used a type of bioflavonoid called hydroxyethylrutosides (HR), which are derived from rutin. These studies have consistently shown a beneficial effect of HR in clearing leg edema and other signs of CVI. Positive results from double blind research has occurred using 500 mg taken twice per day for twelve weeks. HR have also been used
to treat ulcers due to CVI, although this use of HR should not be attempted without medical supervision. It is not clear if other bioflavonoids are as effective as HR for chronic venous insufficiency.

However, nutritionally oriented doctors will sometimes suggest 300–500 mg three to four times per day of readily available citrus bioflavonoids.

Are there any side effects or interactions? Refer to the individual supplement for information about any side effects or interactions.

Herbs that may be helpful: Horse chestnut contains the compound aescin, which has shown to be effective in both partially blind and double blind research, supporting the traditional use of horse chestnut for venous problems. In the medical studies, capsules of horse chestnut extract containing 50 mg of aescin were given twice daily for CVI. The positive effect results in part from horse chestnut’s ability to strengthen capillaries, which leads to less swelling.

Grape seed extracts containing oligomeric proanthocyanidins (OPCs), a group of bioflavonoids, have also been shown to strengthen capillaries in double blind research using as little as two 50 mg tablets per day. Using a total of 150 mg per day, French researchers reported that women with CVI were helped in a double blind trial. Using a total of 300 mg per day (100 mg taken three times),
yet another French double blind trial has reported good effects in just four weeks.10

Very few doctors working with herbal medicine are aware of these and other double blind studies supporting the use of OPCs for people with CVI because virtually all publications of these data are in French; and the studies appear in obscure French medical journals not readily available to healthcare professionals. Nonetheless, the research has been consistent, and OPC-containing grape seed extract products are available.

Another traditional remedy for vein problems is butcher’s broom. One study used a combination of butcher’s broom, the bioflavonoid hesperidin, and vitamin C and found it better than placebo for treating CVI.11 Studies have used one capsule—containing standardized extracts providing 15–30 mg ruscogenins—three times each day.

Gotu kola is another herb recommended by some herbalists for chronic venous insufficiency.

**Are there any side effects or interactions?** Refer to the individual herb for information about any side effects or interactions.

**References:**


