

Vascular malformations



Information for patients
Sheffield Vascular Institute



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You have been given this information booklet as you have been diagnosed with a vascular malformation. This information booklet tells you more about vascular malformations and their treatment and answers some of the more frequently asked questions.

If after reading it, you have any more questions or concerns, you should write them down and discuss them at your next appointment.

Where will my hospital appointments take place?

Your appointments will be at the Sheffield Vascular Institute at the **Northern General Hospital**. The Sheffield Vascular Institute is one of the largest vascular centres in Europe. We specialise in the treatment of all circulatory conditions affecting the arteries, veins and lymphatics. If you wish to find out more about the Sheffield Vascular Institute then look under the Guide to Services of the Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust website: www.sth.nhs.uk.

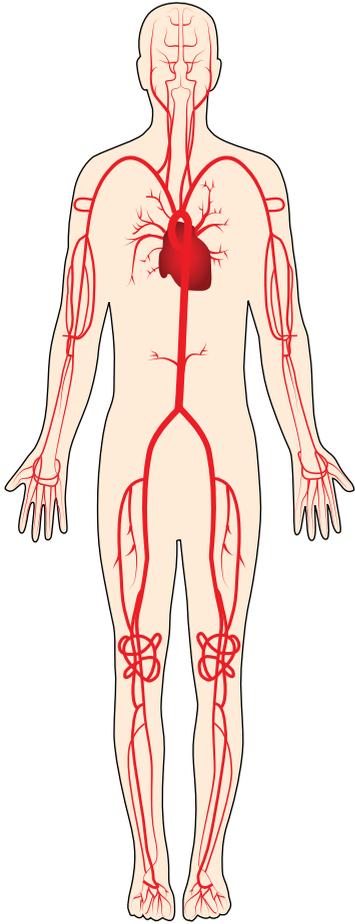
What is a vascular malformation?

A vascular malformation is the term used to describe an abnormality of a blood vessel.

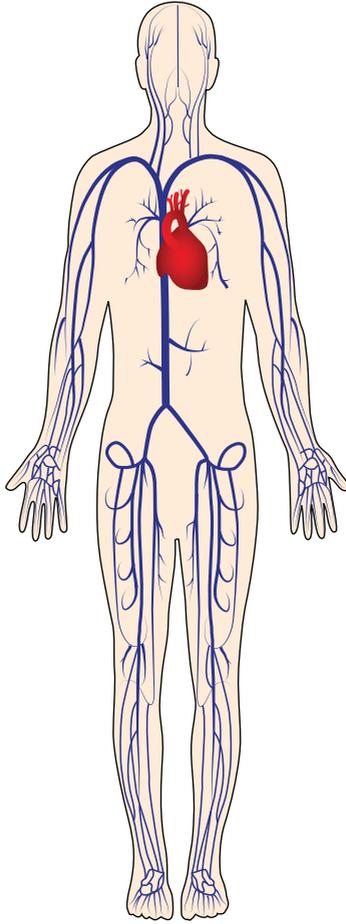
Vessels are tubes that carry liquid around the body. There are two types of liquid - blood and lymph.

There are two main types of vessels that carry blood:

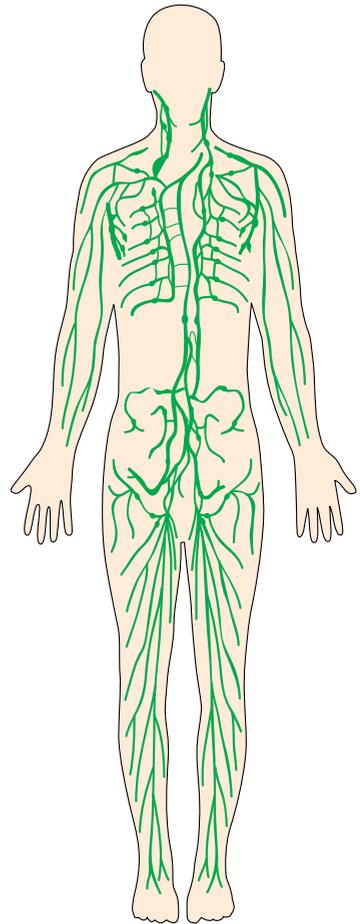
- Arteries - these carry blood away from the heart (high pressure)
- Veins - these carry blood towards the heart (low pressure)



Arterial system



Venous system



Lymphatic system

The vessels that carry lymph are called 'lymphatics'.

If these vessels develop abnormally then the resulting problem is called a malformation.

Most vascular malformations are present from birth but cannot always be seen.

What types of vascular malformation are there?

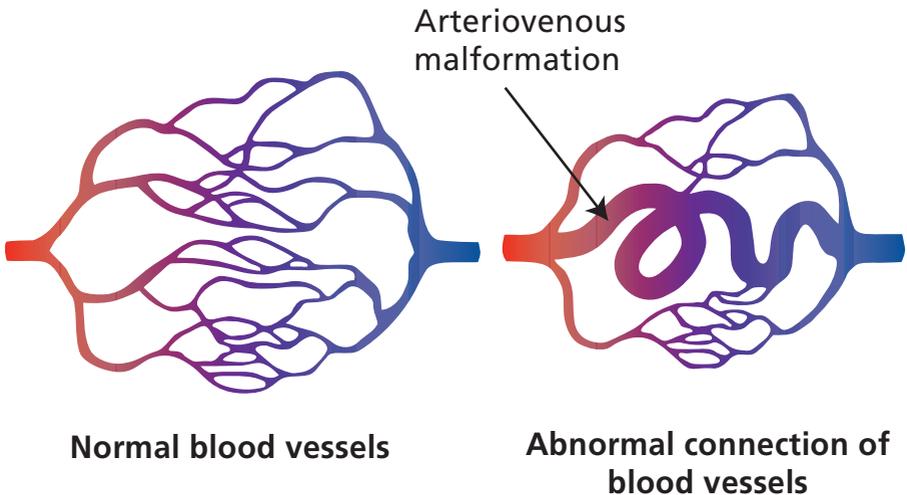
There are three types of vascular malformation:

- Arteriovenous malformation
- Venous malformation
- Lymphatic malformation

Arteriovenous malformations

These form when there are too many arteries and they join abnormally with the veins.

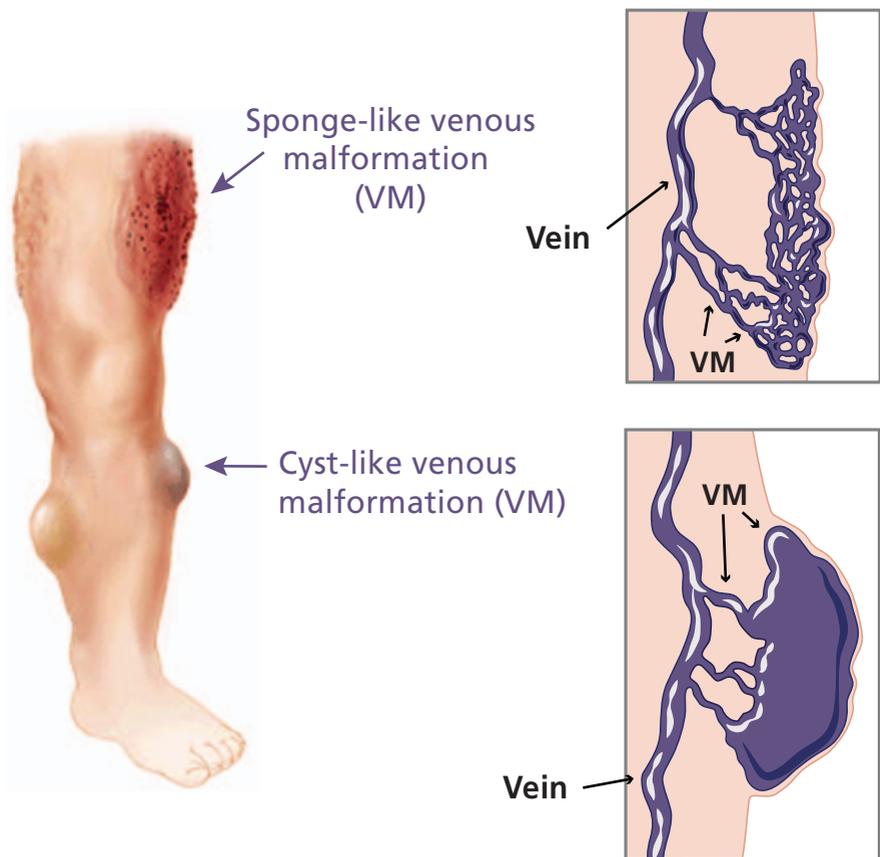
In a normal situation as the arteries travel away from the heart they become smaller to form small capillaries. Once blood has passed into the capillary it passes into the veins. With arteriovenous malformations the blood 'bypasses' the capillaries and the artery and vein join directly.



Arteriovenous malformations are quite rare. Mostly they don't cause any problems, but sometimes they can cause pain or bleeding.

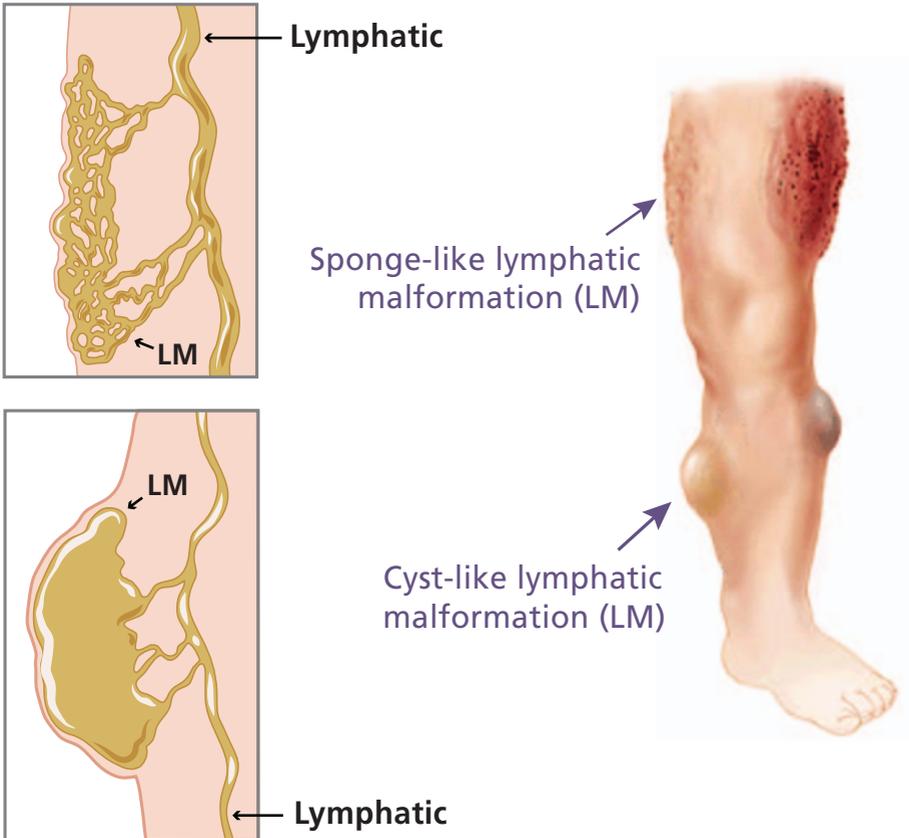
Venous malformations

These form when there are too many veins, which join abnormally to other veins causing 'pools' of blood within the veins. The main symptoms with this type of malformation are pain and swelling. The blood is slow moving in this type of malformation and can cause a thrombosis (hardening of blood inside the vein). They can also appear 'bluish' in colour and cause cosmetic problems if they are in a visible place.



Lymphatic malformations

These form when there are too many lymphatic channels. They join to form fluid filled spaces under the skin and contain clear 'lymph' fluid. They may leak clear lymph fluid from the skin and can become infected.



What causes vascular malformations?

It is difficult to be certain why some people have this problem but doctors think that people are born with the malformation. Sometimes these malformations can be seen in babies and sometimes they can be seen only later on in life.

Certain situations make some malformations grow, for example, exposure to hormones (e.g. puberty, pregnancy, starting the contraceptive pill) and trauma.

In the vast majority of patients these malformations will not be passed on within the family.

Do malformations need treatment?

No, not all malformations need treatment. The need for treatment will depend upon several factors including the size of the malformation, the type of malformation and how severe (if any) the symptoms are. The doctor who sees you will discuss this with you.

What treatments are available?

For most patients, treatment of the malformation is not necessary. If the problem is cosmetic then usually no treatment is needed; sometimes camouflage cosmetics can be helpful.

Venous malformations can be painful. Compression stockings or tight compression garments can be helpful as well as simple painkillers. Both of these are available on prescription from your GP once you have been seen in clinic. The specialist you see will be able to advise you.

Some people with large venous malformations may need to take blood thinning drugs. This is due to the risk of thrombosis from the malformation.

Sometimes malformations may need more active treatment. A treatment called 'embolisation' blocks off some of the vessels. If appropriate, the doctor will talk to you about this treatment.

An operation may be needed to remove the malformation, but this can be difficult and the malformation will return if not completely removed. Occasionally a combination of both embolisation and surgery is needed.

Will I need any tests?

If your doctor decides that you need treatment for the malformation then you will need to undergo tests to look at the malformation more closely. Usually an MR scan is needed. If your malformation is arteriovenous you may need a further test called an angiogram (see separate booklet: Angiography).

Will I need any further appointments?

Following the diagnosis of a vascular malformation, if you need no treatment you can be managed by your GP. If the malformation gets worse, or starts to cause you problems, your GP can send you back for a further appointment.

The doctor you see may feel that your malformation needs monitoring so will bring you back to the outpatient clinic to be reviewed in the future.

If you need treatment for your malformation, this will be discussed and a further information booklet is available (Vascular malformation embolisation).



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