

Variceal bleeding

say **va-ri-seal bleeding**

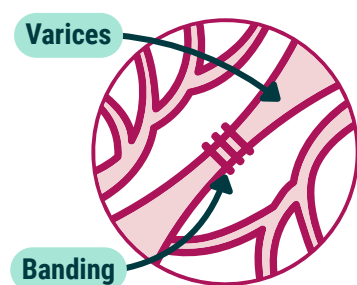
Varices (say **va-ri-sees**) are small veins that are swollen with too much blood. They usually form in your food pipe or stomach, but can be somewhere else. Varices can burst and bleed inside you. The bleeding can be slow or there can suddenly be a lot of bleeding. This can be a medical emergency.

Varices are usually caused by scars in your liver. This is a stage of liver disease called cirrhosis (say **si-row-sis**). Varices can also be caused by a vein leading to your liver getting blocked, for example with a blood clot.

The scars or block make it harder for blood to flow through your liver. This raises blood pressure in your liver's portal vein (portal hypertension). Blood backs-up in the vessels leading to your liver from your stomach and food pipe. It's a bit like how blocked pipes can cause problems at home. The blood still needs to flow around the body somehow.

How is a variceal bleed treated?

The first thing is to control the bleeding and make you stable. If there is a lot of bleeding you might need a blood transfusion. You will have an endoscopy (say **en-doss-coh-pee**) to see what is happening and check for varices. An endoscope is a long, thin, bendy tube that you swallow. It has a light and camera on the end so the doctor can look inside you. You can have medicines to relax you and reduce any pain.



Doctors can usually treat and stop the bleeding during the endoscopy. The main treatment is called banding.

The doctor fixes tiny rubber bands around the veins to redirect the blood flow and stop the bleeding.

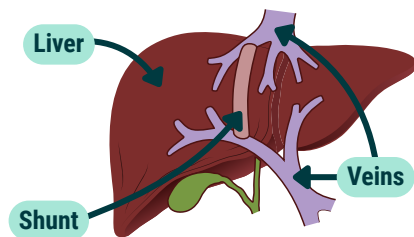
Some people have clotting or sclerotherapy instead. These shut off the veins using blood clots or special glue.

You will have medicines:

- Antibiotics to stop you getting an infection
- Vasoconstrictors to help control the bleeding.

What other treatment might I have for varices?

Your doctor will try to stop any more bleeds from happening. This can be called prevention or prophylaxis (say **pro-fi-lack-sis**). There are different options, and your doctor will talk to you about what is best for your case. You might have regular endoscopies to check for varices. New varices are treated with banding, clotting or sclerotherapy to stop them bursting. You might have medicine to lower the pressure in your veins, such as a beta-blocker.



In some cases you can have an operation to put a special pipe called a shunt into your liver. This is called **TIPSS (Transjugular Intrahepatic PortoSystemic Shunt)**. It helps blood flow through your liver more easily.

Not everyone can have TIPSS. It can have harmful side effects, especially in people with more advanced cirrhosis. Some people with varices need to have a liver transplant assessment. Especially if their liver disease is causing other problems. Ask your doctor if you want to know more.

Looking out for symptoms

Variceal bleeds can happen suddenly. If you notice any of the symptoms below, go to hospital straight away.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Black, tarry or bloody poo• Vomiting blood• Pale skin• Unusually fast heart rate• Stomach pain | Symptoms of shock: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fast, shallow breathing• Cold, clammy skin• Weak pulse• Dizziness, fainting or weakness |
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How we can help: Find out more about the support we offer at liveruk.org/support or call our nurse-led helpline: **0800 652 7330**



More information about cirrhosis and liver disease

Cirrhosis has lots of causes. It is a serious condition but people can live for years with cirrhosis and may not have any symptoms. Treatment can help to manage cirrhosis, stop it getting worse and keep you as healthy as possible. Your doctors and nurses can help you understand what's happening.

