

What are spider veins?

Spider veins are dilated blood vessels near the surface of your skin, most commonly on your legs. Spider veins look like threads or webs and may be red, purple or bluish. They range in size from the width of a hair to a couple of millimeters.

What are varicose veins?

Varicose veins are swollen, enlarged blood vessels and, although superficial, are deeper than spider veins. Often, they are bulging, ropey and blue in appearance. Varicose veins range in size from 5 millimeters to the width of a finger.

How are spider veins and varicose veins treated?

There are various treatment options for spider veins and varicose veins. This information discusses the option of sclerotherapy. If you have questions about this information or about your treatment options, talk with your health care provider.

What is sclerotherapy?

Sclerotherapy is the most common treatment for spider veins and smaller varicose veins. In sclerotherapy, the veins are injected with a solution that makes them collapse and, eventually, go away. Circulation is not impaired because it has already been rerouted to other healthy veins nearby.

Which veins can be treated with sclerotherapy?

Potentially, any spider veins or varicose veins can be treated with sclerotherapy. Talk with your health care provider about the best treatment for your spider veins or varicose veins.

If you are pregnant, think you may be pregnant or are thinking about getting pregnant, you should not have sclerotherapy.

What happens during a sclerotherapy treatment?

Sclerotherapy is an outpatient treatment. No anesthesia is used.

You will change into a gown or be asked to bring shorts that you can wear during the sclerotherapy. You will lie on a table and, using a tiny needle about as thick as a hair, the health care provider will inject the solution into the veins to be treated. You may have from one to 100 injections at a time, depending on the areas to be treated.

Most people do not complain of significant pain during the procedure. The treated areas may look like many mosquitoes have bitten you. When your treatment is done, compression stockings will be put in place, and you can go home. You can drive yourself home after the treatment.

What kinds of side effects can I expect?

You may have a few side effects within minutes to a few days after sclerotherapy. They usually are temporary and include the following:

- Bruising. Occasionally, blood escapes from the treated veins and forms a red or brown bruise. This usually goes away within a few weeks.
- Discomfort. Some people have a burning or stinging sensation during injection. Others may have some cramping in the leg that occurs 30 to 60 seconds after the injections. This cramping usually lasts about one minute.
- Swelling and aching. Some people, especially those who have many veins treated, may have some leg swelling. This may be accompanied by an aching sensation in the legs. Pain medication (as indicated by your health care provider) and elevation of the legs are often enough to ease the discomfort.
- Nodules. Sometimes a treated vein will form a lump under the skin. This feels like a bump and usually goes away over several months.

How many veins can be treated during each visit?

Generally, many veins can be injected in a single treatment session. People with large numbers of spider veins may require multiple visits to treat different areas.

How many times does it have to be done?

Everyone responds to sclerotherapy differently. Several injections may be needed for certain veins. In most people, sclerotherapy will eliminate most of the veins after a few treatments.

How soon can I be re-treated?

The same area can be injected again after about one to three months.

How soon will the vessels disappear?

The process of destroying the veins begins immediately. However, each person is different and results vary. Usually it takes approximately two months for the veins to disappear.

It is important to note that sclerotherapy does not prevent development of new spider veins or varicose veins. Also, some people may not respond to sclerotherapy.

What should I do after treatment?

- You will wear compression stockings, depending on the number and size of veins treated. Wear the compression stockings as instructed by your health care provider.
- Avoid hot tubs or hot baths as long as you are wearing compression stockings. Talk to your health care provider about bathing after your sclerotherapy.
- In general, you can return to your normal daily life activities after sclerotherapy. However, before you do strenuous exercise, talk with your health care provider.