

Microsclerotherapy

General procedure information

Millions of women are bothered by thread veins - those small yet unsightly clusters of red, blue or purple veins that most commonly appear on the thighs, calves and ankles.

Today, many cosmetic surgeons are treating thread veins with sclerotherapy. In this simple procedure, veins are injected with a solution, which causes them to collapse and fade. The procedure may also remedy the bothersome symptoms associated with spider veins, including aching, burning, swelling and night cramps.

What are spider or thread veins?

They are the small, thin veins that lie close to the surface of the skin. Although these super-fine veins are connected with the larger venous system, they are not an essential part of it.

A number of factors contribute to the development of thread veins, including heredity, pregnancy and other events that cause hormonal shifts, weight gain, occupations or activities that require prolonged sitting or standing and the use of certain medications.

Varicose veins differ from thread veins in a number of ways. Varicose veins are larger - usually more than a quarter-inch in diameter, darker in colour and tend to bulge. Varicose veins are also more likely to cause pain and be related to more serious vein disorders. For some patients, sclerotherapy can be used to treat varicose veins. However, often surgical treatment is necessary for this condition.

The best candidates for sclerotherapy

Women of any age may be good candidates for sclerotherapy, but most fall in the 30-to-60 category. If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, you may be advised to postpone sclerotherapy treatment. In most cases, thread veins that surface during pregnancy will disappear on their own within three months after the baby is born. Also, because it's not known how sclerosing solutions may affect breast milk, nursing mothers are usually advised to wait until after they have stopped breastfeeding.

What to expect

Sclerotherapy can enhance your appearance and your self confidence, but it's unrealistic to believe that every affected vein will disappear completely as a result of treatment. After each sclerotherapy session, the veins will appear lighter. Two or more sessions are usually required to achieve optimal results.

You should also be aware that the procedure treats only those veins that are currently visible; it does nothing to permanently alter the venous system or prevent new veins from surfacing in the future.

Risks related to microsclerotherapy

Serious medical complications from sclerotherapy are extremely rare. However, they may occur. Risks include the formation of blood clots in the veins, severe inflammation, adverse allergic reactions to the sclerosing solution and skin injury that could leave a small but permanent scar.

A common cosmetic complication is pigmentation irregularity - brownish splotches on the affected skin that may take months to fade, sometimes up to a year. Another problem that can occur is "telangiectatic matting", in which fine reddish blood vessels appear around the treated area, requiring further injections.

Planning

During your initial consultation, your legs will be examined. Mr Yelland will draw a simple sketch of your legs, mapping out the areas affected by spider veins or other problems. During the examination, you will be checked for signs of more serious "deep vein" problems, often indicated by swelling, sores, or skin changes.

Preparing

You will receive specific instructions from Mr Yelland on how to prepare for your treatment. Carefully following these instructions will help the procedure go more smoothly.

You'll be instructed not to apply any type of moisturizer, sunblock or oil to your legs on the day of your procedure. You may want to bring shorts to wear during the injections, as well as your support tights and trousers to wear home.

When scheduling your procedure, keep in mind that your legs may be bruised or slightly discoloured for some weeks afterward. You probably won't be comfortable wearing shorts, a swimsuit or a mini skirt.

The procedure in Microsclerotherapy

A typical session is relatively quick, lasting about 15 to 45 minutes. After changing into shorts, your legs will be photographed for your medical records. You will be asked to lie down on the examination table and the skin over your veins will be cleaned with an antiseptic solution. Using one hand to stretch the skin taut, your surgeon will begin injecting the sclerosing agent into the affected veins. Bright, indirect light and magnification help ensure that the process is completed with maximum precision.

Approximately one injection is administered for every inch of thread vein - anywhere from five to 40 injections per treatment session. A cotton ball and compression tape is applied to each area of the leg as it is finished.

During the procedure, you may listen to music, read, or just talk to your practitioner. You will be asked to shift positions a few times during the process. As the procedure continues, you will feel small



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needle sticks and possibly a mild burning sensation. However, the needle used is so thin and the sclerosing solution is so mild that pain is usually minimal.

After your Microsclerotherapy treatment

In addition to the compression tape applied during the procedure, tight-fitting support tights may be prescribed to guard against blood clots and to promote healing. The tape and cotton balls can be removed after 48 hours. However, you may be instructed to wear the support tights for 72 hours or more.

It's not uncommon to experience some cramping in the legs for the first day or two after the injections. This temporary problem usually doesn't require medication.

You should be aware that your treated veins will look worse before they begin to look better. When the compression dressings are removed, you will notice bruising and reddish areas at the injection sites. The bruises will diminish within one month. In many cases, there may be some residual brownish pigmentation which may take up to a year to completely fade.

Getting back to normal

You will be encouraged to walk to prevent clots from forming in the deep veins of the legs. However, during the period of time to complete your treatment program, prolonged sitting and standing should be avoided, as should squatting, heavy weight lifting and "pounding" type exercises, including jogging.

A one-month healing interval must pass before you may have your second series of injections in the same site. After each treatment, you will notice further improvement of your legs' appearance.

Your new look

Most patients are pleased with the difference sclerotherapy makes. The skin of your legs will appear younger, clearer and more healthy-looking. If you've been wearing long skirts and trousers to hide your spider veins, you'll now be able to broaden your fashion horizons. Often, patients are surprised at the dramatic difference in appearance between a treated leg and an untreated one.