

## VASCULAR SURGERY

# Understanding spider veins

Unravelling essential facts about those thread-like veins.



Spider veins — also known as thread veins, telangiectasia or broken veins — are small, unsightly clusters of pink and purple thread-like veins that lie near the surface of the skin. Commonly found on the legs, they can also appear on the face and other parts of the body.

### Causes

Genetics, pregnancy, and long-term use of high-heeled shoes are some causes of this condition.

High-heeled shoes restrict the function and circulation of calf muscles while pregnancy is a common cause for the occurrence of spider veins due to the increased volume of blood, which creates significant pressure on the blood vessels, causing even small veins to swell.

Too much sun exposure could also cause a breakdown in the collagen beneath the skin and the blood vessels near the skin, giving rise to spider veins on the face, especially around the nose.

### Symptoms

Most patients with spider veins don't experience discomfort, but some may have the following symptoms:

- Tired, heavy, aching legs
- Numbness and tingling around the veins
- Night cramps

Spider veins are not harmful to the health and may not need to be treated. However, treatments can be beneficial when:

- they cause aches, pain and numbness and this affects your lifestyle
- their appearance bothers you and restricts your dressing style
- there are associated tortuous-looking blue veins that suggest you may have varicose veins

### Treatments

While many forms of treatments are available for spider veins, not all are equally effective in addressing the problem.

Skin laser or light therapy are sometimes proffered with the aim of burning the tiny veins. However, unlike pigmentation or skin spots that can be treated effectively this way, spider veins do not respond as well. This is because they are akin to small streams connected to a bigger river. Closing the stream without first damming the river will simply cause more streams to form. Skin laser treatment can only hope to close the stream, not the river, which often makes it ineffective.

Moreover, about 5–10% of patients with spider veins may also have varicose veins. These can be problematic if they are concurrent blue and tortuous veins that may or may not be bulging.

For effective treatment, an ultrasound examination may be necessary to exclude this possibility. Based on clinical examination and ultrasound findings, an individualised treatment regimen that is best suited to the patient's condition can then be prescribed. This usually involves combinations of foam sclerotherapy, injection sclerotherapy and Nd:YAG laser, if necessary. [🔗](#)



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