

Injection Sclerotherapy for Reticular and “Spider” Veins (Microsclerotherapy)

What are “spider veins”?

“Reticular”, “Spider” and “Thread” are terms used to describe small red or blue veins that are abnormal and cause an unsightly appearance. They are different to varicose veins in that they are usually less than 2 mm in size and do not bulge. Some patients have both spider and varicose veins.

Spider veins are harmless and do not usually cause any symptoms. They often form at the site of previous bruising and people who develop them are likely to develop more as time passes.

Do spider veins need to be treated?

Reticular and spider veins are harmless and do not need treatment. It is very unusual for the veins to cause symptoms and even if there are symptoms in the area of the veins, treatment may not help. Treatment is therefore usually cosmetic.

What treatments are available?

Reticular and spider veins can be treated using laser or injections. As a general rule, laser treatments are better for facial veins and injection works better for leg veins. The injection treatment is called microsclerotherapy and involves a tiny needle being inserted into the vein which is then injected with a substance called a sclerosant which causes the vein to close. The sclerosant that we use is called Sodium Tetradecyl Sulphate (STS) which has been used for injecting veins since the 1940s.

Each treatment session involves multiples small injections. These injections are associated with a mild burning and tingling feeling over the injected vein.

Once the vein is injected it becomes inflamed. The vein and the area around become red and raised and appear not dissimilar to an insect bite. The redness quickly settles and a mark is left in the skin along the length of the vein. This mark varies in colour from black to brown to green and is the closed vein. Your body then reabsorbs the closed vein.

The treatment is quick and you can return to work immediately. You should expect to have at least two treatment sessions and depending on the extent of your veins you may require more.

When will the vein have disappeared?

This varies from person to person and from vein to vein. As a general rule the older the patient and the bluer the vein the longer it takes. After the treatment the area looks worse for a period of time and then gradually improves. Usually by 4 months there is often still some residual staining but people are happy that it looks better. In some people however the residual brown staining can take many months (up to 2 years) for the final appearance and in about 10-15% some residual skin staining will persist. Most people prefer this to the vein but a small number (approx. 1%) regret having the treatment.

Complications:

Skin staining

This is by far the commonest complication and is present in almost every patient for a period of time. It may be permanent. While it is still present the area should be protected from the sun as sun exposure may contribute to making it last longer or even make it permanent.

Ulceration

Tiny ulcers (3 mm) can form at the site of injection (about 1% patients) - these are uncomfortable and take a while (up to 8 weeks) to heal. They leave a tiny hardly noticeable scar when healed. Larger ulcers (1cm) can also occur but much more rarely (about 1 in 500 treatments). These can take longer to heal and sometimes to hasten healing they need to be cut out under local anaesthetic with a resulting small scar.

Allergic Reaction

These are rare (about 1 in 4000 patients).

Deep Venous Thrombosis (DVT)

This has been reported after microsclerotherapy but always in patients who have another reason to form a DVT and it is difficult to say that the treatment itself caused the clot.