

Sclerotherapy (Injection) Treatment Frequently Asked Questions

Unwanted leg veins (spider veins), known medically as “telangiectasias” or superficial varicosities are dilated skin capillaries. These may become unsightly with time and may also lead to dull aching of the legs after prolonged standing.

Sclerotherapy is the technique of injecting a solution into these vessels (tiny capillaries or larger varicose veins) with a small needle. The solution irritates and destroys the inner lining of the blood vessel so it ceases to carry blood. The body then replaces this damaged vessel with scar tissue. Several injections may be needed for a specific area of telangiectasias. Fading of the vessels is a slow process which may take up to 6 – 12 months. The goal is to produce a 75% to 90% improvement in both appearance and symptoms.

1. What causes spider veins?

No one is totally sure. Certain families are predisposed to this condition, particularly female relatives. Certain things make spider veins worse: estrogens (female hormones), pregnancy, birth control pills, tight girdles and garter belts, prolonged standing or sitting, and trauma.

2. How does sclerotherapy work?

The solution destroys the tiny cells which line the blood vessels, with damage to the surrounding tissues.

3. How soon with the vessels disappear?

The vessels disappear over a period of 2 weeks to 6 months. Recurrences may rarely occur over a period of 1 – 5 years. This treatment does not prevent new telangiectasias from developing.

4. How often can I be treated?

The same area should not be injected for 2 weeks to allow for complete healing. Different areas may be treated every week.

5. How many times does it have to be done?

This varies with the number of areas that have to be injected, as well as the response to each injection. It usually takes one to three injections to obliterate any vessel.

6. Are there certain kinds of spider veins that cannot be treated?

Certain types of larger varicose veins may not respond readily to sclerotherapy alone. These vessels may require a minor surgical procedure.

7. What is ultrasound guided sclerotherapy?

Visual sclerotherapy refers to injection of surface veins that are visible to the naked eye. Some veins that need to be treated are below the surface of the skin and cannot be injected safely without the aid of ultrasound imaging assistance.

8. Is there any way to prevent spider veins?

The use of support hose may be helpful. Reducing you weight and regular exercise may also be of help.

9. What are the side effects of sclerotherapy of spider veins?

- a. Slight blistering may occur around the injected vessels.
- b. 10% – 30% of patients develop a small freckle-like tan to brown spot around the injected vessel. This usually resolves in 80% of these patients within 6 – 12 months. A few patients will have a persistent freckle.
- c. Slight stinging or burning may occur with the injection.
- d. Sometimes a clot develops at the injection site. These typically do not require treatment.
- e. Swelling over the injection site may rarely occur.
- f. A small superficial ulcerations of the skin overlying the injected vessel may occur. This area may look like a small scab with redness around the site. Please keep this area clean and dry. Clean with soap and water. There is no special ointment needed on this area. Over the next few months this area will heal and you may be left with a small scar. If you are concerned or have questions, please call the office.
- g. Superficial thrombophlebitis occurs in less than 1 per 1000 patients.

Common side effects:

- a. You may experience mild itching along the vein route. This itching normally lasts 1 to 2 days.
- b. A few patients may experience mild to moderate pain and some bruising, usually at the site of the injection. The veins may be tender to the touch after treatment and an uncomfortable sensation may run along the vein route. This pain is usually temporary, in most cases lasting no more than 3 days.

RESULTS OF TREATMENT CANNOT BE GUARANTEED, BUT MOST PATIENTS ARE VERY PLEASED WITH THE COSMETIC AND FUNCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT.