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Thread Veins - Frequently Asked Questions

The aim of this information sheet is to ensure that you understand the nature of the treatment you wish to undertake. Please read it carefully and discuss any queries with us.

What are thread veins?

Thread veins, sometimes known as spider veins, are very fine vessels close to the surface of the skin. They occur most frequently in the skin around the thigh and calves and occasionally on the face. They vary in size, pigmentation and intensity from person to person and depending on the skin type can be very visible. They are very common and there is a definite hereditary link and an association with pregnancy. Jobs involving a lot of standing can also be a problem as can carrying extra weight. These veins are unsightly and can also cause aching of the legs in some patients. They are usually the result of a familial predisposition and they can manifest from resolving bruises.

How can they be treated?

Thread veins are treated using a variety of techniques. The most useful method for the vast majority of thread veins is called micro-sclerotherapy. This involves an injection of solution through a very fine needle into the vein. The solution damages the vein causing it to be removed by the body's own defence mechanisms over a period of a few months. With very fine clusters of veins, a process using thermo-coagulation is also successful. A high (radio) frequency current is sent through a very fine needle into the vein causing the wall to heat up and then break up. Generally, patients need a combination of techniques for the most effective results. Micro-sclerotherapy and radio-frequency ablation (VeinWave) is carried out by a properly trained doctor or specialist nurse.

Can anyone have treatment with Veinwave?

Veinwave treatment is contra-indicated in patients who suffer from infectious skin conditions, those who are pregnant, those suffering from epilepsy and patients who have a pacemaker or take anticoagulants. The cauterising needle used in treatment is made from nickel and therefore patients with a nickel allergy should inform the veinwave practitioner.

What happens during treatment?

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Microsclerotherapy involves a small amount of solution being injected into thread veins using a very fine needle. We use a solution called sodium polidocanol (Sclerovein®) that over many years of use, we have found to be the most effective. The solution displaces the blood within the vein causing it to blanch. It also irritates the vein making it swell and close, thus stopping the blood re-entering it. Treated veins will usually disappear within two to six months. Bandages are applied after treatment, so it is advisable to wear loose fitting clothes. Veinwave is not dissimilar to electrolysis and involves a small needle entering a fine vein in the face or legs. Patients will usually have a small patch test initially to see how the skin reacts to the treatment. Some patients can feel mild discomfort during this procedure (like a bee sting) and we can provide a local anaesthetic cream (Emla®) to help take the edge off the discomfort.

Are there any side effects of treatment?

Following injection an initial inflammatory reaction is common, the veins may appear more prominent and bruising may occur. It is important to appreciate that the full benefits of treatment may not be appreciated for around 2-6 months. While most patients have no side effects from sclerotherapy, a small number experience one or more of the following:

- A minor allergic reaction at the injection site.
- Discomfort, hardness at the injection site with pigmentation and rarely ulceration.
- Following treatment with Veinwave, patients may experience redness and /or a raising of the skin over the area that has been treated. Occasionally a small crust might develop which may last for several days. In most cases complete healing should be seen in 2 weeks although this can sometimes take longer.

How many sessions will I need?

Depending on how extensive your thread veins are and how your body responds to treatment, you may need more than one session of treatment. Most patients average three sessions and more than five is quite uncommon. The sessions usually last 20-30 minutes and take place every 2-3 weeks.

Do the veins come back?

Women who are prone to getting thread veins are likely to continue to get them after the initial treatments are complete. We find that the treatment of thread veins is an ongoing process throughout subsequent years with patients tending to return for treatment once every year or two if new thread veins have appeared.

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Post Treatment Care

You will be able to drive straight after the treatment and get back to normal activities.

- If the skin is broken or a blister appears, you should contact us.
- Cold packs, aloe vera or any other cooling preparation may be used to ease a temporary discomfort – particularly useful if you have had Veinwave to thread veins on the face.
- Sun exposure is to be avoided for at least three weeks following treatment. A total sun block, not sunscreen, should be applied.
- The bandages should stay on if comfortable for at least 24/36 hours. Compression hosiery should be worn post treatment for at least one week. You are not expected to wear the support socks/tights at night.
- Make up can be applied normally as long as the skin surface is not broken.
- Hot baths are not advised for 24 hours. Quick showers are recommended.