



{ M E X P E R T }

LOVE YOUR LEGS

Minimally Invasive Varicose and Spider Vein Treatments

By Anup K. Singh, MD

MANY PEOPLE ARE FRUSTRATED by abnormal veins which appear on their legs. The appearance of these veins often result in embarrassment and a change in lifestyle (wearing only pants, not wearing a bathing suit). Most of these veins are either spider telangiectasias, often called “spider veins,” or varicose veins. Spider veins are tiny red/purple vessels on the skin surface that look like branching trees or webs. Varicose veins are large bulging green or flesh-colored blood vessels which twist and turn and are raised on the skin surface.

The job of all veins is to return blood to the heart. In the legs, the veins must fight the effects of gravity, drawing the blood to the feet, and so they are under higher pressure. This can cause small failures of some of the vein valves which then causes blood to pool in the leg veins, resulting in the prominent vessels the patient experiences.

Common risk factors for development of these veins include a family history of abnormal veins, prior pregnancy, weight gain, increasing age, and occupations/activities which require a lot of standing or sitting. They are more common in women than men, but many men are also affected.

Patients with varicose veins often complain of painful, tender or aching veins or legs, sometimes associated with cramping. Other symptoms include restlessness, burning, throbbing, or a generalized heaviness or swelling in the legs or feet. Over time, the patient may develop thickening of the skin, discoloration about the ankles, or venous ulcerations which can be difficult to treat. Varicose veins may also bleed from minor trauma or form painful clots. Spider veins can itch or throb painfully, as well.

Fortunately, there are effective treatments available to address both the cosmetic concerns and the medical symptoms associated with these abnormal veins. The first step is to try compression stockings; however they are not a long-term solution for most people and don't actually get rid of any veins. For spider veins, I recommend sclerotherapy, as it is the most effective

treatment. Sclerotherapy involves putting a tiny needle, similar to an acupuncture needle, into the vein and injecting a liquid that irritates the vein wall and causes it to fade. Other options include surface laser and intense pulse light (IPL), in which light energy sources are focused on the spider veins to damage them. However, these treatments tend to be less effective.

For varicose veins, if the patient has the symptoms described above, the veins should be treated with endovenous ablation. During this procedure, a small fiber is placed in the vein and either laser or radiofrequency energy is used to collapse the vein walls shut. It is highly effective at reducing the pain and discomfort associated with varicose veins. The laser ablation process is sometimes supplemented with ambulatory phlebectomy (removal of the vein), which can produce a strikingly more pleasing and smoother appearance of the area. Vein stripping surgery, which used to be a common treatment, is no longer needed.

In the right hands, treatments for varicose and spider veins are minimally invasive and very effective for both the medical symptoms and cosmetics. Although many doctors offer vein treatments, it is important to go to a properly trained and highly experienced vascular specialist whose focus is treatment of the veins. You only have one pair of legs, and you want them to look and feel their best. ☺



BEFORE



AFTER



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