



Fact Sheet

Thread Veins: Microsclerotherapy

Microsclerotherapy refers to the treatment of small veins and 'broken' capillaries, mostly on the legs, though sometimes on the face, by tiny injection of a specially formulated and widely used solution.

The vast majority of small, clearly visible veins can be successfully treated. These are known by a number of descriptive terms – 'star burst veins, broken capillaries, spider veins', to name but a few. The correct medical term is telangiectasias. Very fine vessels, such as those more commonly found on the face are better treated by laser.

Leg thread veins can be treated by microsclerotherapy or laser therapy and the treatment most appropriate for your particular problem will be discussed at the initial consultation.

Treatment

A tiny needle is introduced into the vessel being treated. The vessel is then filled with a sclerosant in a concentration designed to cause microscopic damage to the cells lining the vein. The body's repair mechanisms respond to this injury by trying to heal the vessel and in the process, shrink or obliterate it.

Generally one injection is needed per vein or 'spray' of interconnecting veins. A small amount of local anaesthetic (lignocaine, as used by dentists) is mixed into the injection solution. This results in minimal discomfort being experienced during the procedure; a tiny prick is followed by a mild sting that lasts only a few seconds. It is much less painful than any other type of injection or blood test.

A cotton swab may be taped over the injection site which only needs to be left for half an hour or so. It is wise to wear a long skirt or trousers when coming for treatment, to hide the swabs. Occasionally, a bandage or support stockings must be worn afterwards; the need for which would be discussed at your initial assessment. The average treatment session is twenty to thirty minutes and is performed in the clinic.

Possible Complications

Complications following sclerotherapy are rare, but occasionally the saline solution can escape from the tiny vessel and this may produce a little inflammatory change in the surrounding skin. It should be noted that thread veins in the lower legs, and especially around the ankle, are much more difficult to treat and there is a small but definite risk of the development of a tiny ulcer following sclerotherapy. Following treatment, some patients develop a brown discolouration of the skin. This is more common in the lower leg than the upper leg and is due to the deposition, either of sun tan pigment melanin, or much more rarely, an iron-containing pigment known as hemosiderin.

Pigmentary change associated with melanin deposition may take several months to fade away. The much more uncommon pigmentary change due to hemosiderin may persist for much longer. Patients taking vitamins with iron supplements, can, in some cases develop

staining of the skin. Patients are advised to stop taking these supplements prior to treatment. Patients should discuss this at their consultation.

Please note that "matting", a proliferation of tiny red vessels around the injection site, can occur in about 10% of patients treated by sclerotherapy and it is not possible to predict before treatment, who will respond in this way and who will not. This matting reaction however, can usually be treated effectively with the Pulsed Dye laser.

In the medical literature it is recorded that deep venous thrombosis (a clot in the deeper veins of the leg) can occur following sclerotherapy. This is extremely rare, but you should let the clinic know if you have persisting discomfort in your leg following treatment.

After Treatment

For one or two weeks after treatment, the vessels may appear more prominent. The injection sites will look like insect bites for a few days and may itch. The veins will begin to fade after about a week or so and continue to do so for up to eight weeks and occasionally longer if the veins are large to begin with. After eight weeks, any remaining vessels may be re-injected to achieve further improvement.

The larger and more purple the veins are to begin with, the more treatments they will need for eradication. Most patients will need between one and six treatments. It is quite safe to perform all daily activities after treatment and in fact, exercise is encouraged. There is rarely any discomfort at all afterwards, although an area of very numerous or large veins may look like a bruise for a few days. Aloe Vera, which is available from all Lasercare clinics may help soothe any irritation.

If a lot of treatment is performed around the ankle, some temporary swelling is common and may be relieved by a bandage or elastic stocking. It is not usually necessary to take time off work.

After all veins large enough to be injected have been sclerosed, there are frequently a few pink thread like vessels left behind. These are impossible to inject further, as they are smaller than the size of the needle but usually respond to laser therapy. Patients should have realistic expectations that whilst 90%+ clearance is common, 100% disappearance of all veins is rare.

For any further information please call us on our Freephone number – 0800 028 7222