

Sclerotherapy Information

What is Sclerotherapy?

Sclerotherapy is a popular method for eliminating spider veins that utilizes various solutions, called sclerosing agents, which are injected into the veins. Various sclerosing agents are available in the US. The physician will discuss the various agents with you and chose which one is best suited to your needs.

Does Sclerotherapy work for everyone?

The majority of persons who have sclerotherapy performed note improvement in the appearance of the spider veins after 2 treatments. Most patients require 6 treatments for complete clearing of the veins. Approximately 10% of patients who undergo sclerotherapy will have veins that do not totally disappear after six treatments. In very rare instances the patient's condition may become worse after sclerotherapy treatment. The best results will be obtained when the patient is conscientious about wearing the suggested support hose for three days following the injections.

How many treatments will I need?

The number of treatments needed to clear or improve the condition differs from patient to patient, depending on the size of the spider veins. One to six or more treatments may be needed; **the average is three to four**. Individual veins usually require one to three treatments. Because only 3cc of sclerosing solution may be injected per visit, patients with many spider veins may only be able to have 30% - 50% of them treated each visit. The doctor will discuss this with you during your consultation appointment. Injections can be performed every 2 weeks. Each treatment takes approximately 30 minutes.

What are the most common side effects?

The most common side effects experienced with sclerotherapy treatments include the following:

1. *Cramping*: Depending on the type of solution used, you may experience mild cramping along the vein route. This normally lasts 20 minutes but may persist longer in a minority of patients. Slight itching may be noted along the vein route for one hour after treatment and may persist for one or two days in a minority of patients.
2. *Transient Hyperpigmentation*: Approximately 10% of patients who undergo sclerotherapy notice discoloration (light brown streaks) after treatment. In almost every patient the veins become darker immediately after the procedure. This darkening usually resolves in 10 to 14 days. In rare instances this darkening of the vein persists for 4 to 12 months. The use of sunscreen on the legs after treatment may help decrease the incidence of these streaks.
3. *Erosions/blisters*: Erosions occur in less than 1% of the patients who receive sclerotherapy. This small ulceration at the injection site heals slowly over 1 to 2 months. A blister may form, open, and become ulcerated. The scar that follows should return to a normal color. This occurrence usually represents injection into or near a small artery and is not preventable. However, this is an uncommon side effect.
4. *Allergic reactions*: Very rarely a patient may have an allergic reaction to the sclerosing agent used. The risk of an allergic reaction is greater in patients who have a history of allergies. The doctors in our clinic prefer to use NaCl 23.5% as the sclerosing solution because it has the lowest incidence of allergic reactions when compared to the other solutions available on the market.
5. *Pain*: The needles used to inject are the same size as an acupuncture needle, therefore patients rarely complain of pain from the needles. However, a few patients experience moderate to severe pain that they describe as cramping after the solution is injected in larger veins. This uncomfortable sensation usually resolves in less than 20 minutes. The veins may be tender to the touch after treatment. This pain is usually temporary, in most cases lasts 1 to 2 days.
6. *Bruising*: Bruising may occur at the site of injection. Avoiding aspirin, Ibuprofen, Motrin, Vitamin E, and green tea for 10 days prior to receiving the injections can decrease this risk of bruising.
7. *Telangiectatic matting*: This refers to the development of new tiny blood vessels in the foot or ankle. It usually resolves in a few days and is lessened by wearing the prescribed support stockings.
8. *Ankle swelling*: Ankle swelling may occur after treatment of blood vessels in the foot or ankle. It usually resolves in a few days and is lessened by wearing the prescribed support stockings.
9. *Phlebitis*: Phlebitis is a very rare complication, seen in approximately 1 out of every 1000 patients treated for varicose veins greater than 3 to 4 mm in diameter. However, varicose veins of this size are not treated by sclerotherapy, as there are new surgical options that are available. Please ask your doctor for more information.

What precautions must I take after receiving the injections? The best results will be obtained if the patient wears support stocking with at least 18mm Hg pressure. These are sold in our office for convenience but may also be found in pharmacies. Walking and exercise is encouraged after the procedure and there are no restrictions on activity after the procedure. Patients may want to wear pants the day of the injection because cotton balls will be taped over the injected areas. The cotton balls can be removed 6 hours after the treatment.

What are the possible complications if I do not have sclerotherapy performed?

The spider veins will continue to get bigger, and therefore, more painful to treat. However, there are no health risks associated with small spider veins. This is a cosmetic problem.

Are there other types of procedures to treat varicose veins and telangiectasias? What are their side effects?

New lasers are being developed (many are studied in our center) to treat spider veins but the current research shows that the laser treatments are more expensive and less effective than sclerotherapy. Ambulatory phlebectomy is a procedure in which certain types of veins can be removed through small surgical incisions. The complications of this procedure are similar to those of sclerotherapy with the addition of small surgical scars that naturally occur with this procedure. Dr. Mandy performs this procedure and will be able to offer up to date information if desired.

Vein stripping and or ligation, performed by a vascular surgeon, may also be used to treat the very large varicose veins. This procedure may require a hospital stay and usually is performed while the patient is under general anesthesia. Risks of vein stripping and / or ligation include permanent nerve paralysis in a small percentage of patients, possible pulmonary emboli, infection, and permanent scarring.