SIMON HOBBS
Vein Clinics

# Microsclerotherapy for leg thread veins

**The aim of this information sheet is to help answer some of the questions you may have about having microsclerotherapy for your leg thread veins. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives to the procedure as well as what you can expect when you come to the clinic.**
**If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.**

## What are leg thread veins?

Thread veins are small blue, purple or red veins that are located just under the skin surface and commonly affect the legs and ankles. They are also referred to as spider veins or broken veins. The medical terms for these veins are reticular veins and telangiectasia.

## How are leg thread veins diagnosed?

Leg thread veins are diagnosed by a careful clinical examination of the leg. The diagnosis itself is usually straightforward and the most important part of the examination is excluding deeper seated problems with feeder veins or varicose veins. Up to 8 out of 10 people with leg thread veins have associated varicose or feeder veins. These need to be recognised and treated to achieve the best results for your thread vein treatment.

For this reason I recommend that all patients with leg thread veins undergo a comprehensive ultrasound scan of the leg to exclude these deeper seated problems.

## What is microsclerotherapy?

Microsclerotherapy is a straightforward procedure that is performed in a treatment room and usually takes between 30-45 minutes.

A liquid called a sclerosant (Fibrovein) is injected directly into the thread veins using a very fine needle with minimal discomfort. The sclerosant acts by damaging the lining of the vein and causing the vein to become inflamed. This results in the vein blocking off and then over a period of time the vein is reabsorbed completely back into the body.

After injecting the thread veins the leg is placed in a compression stocking. This is important as the compression keeps the veins emptied to prevent blood re-entering the treated veins and reduces the chance of complications such as skin staining.
Dressings are placed over the small cuts and a compression bandage and stocking are placed on the leg. Over the next few days the body reacts to the damaged vein by causing inflammation (swelling) and absorbing the tissue in the vein. This makes sure that the vein stays closed permanently.

## How well does microsclerotherapy work?

Microsclerotherapy is recognised to be the best treatment for leg thread veins. The most usual scenario is a 70-80% improvement in the appearance of the thread veins after a course of treatment. Feedback from patients indicate that 8 out of 10 are pleased or very pleased with the final appearance of their leg, 1 out of 10 have only a modest improvement and 1 out of 10 find no benefit.

Successfully treated veins remain permanently closed however it is possible for new thread veins to occur with time on the legs. These can usually be treated at an early stage with further microsclerotherapy to prevent them worsening.

## How soon will I see results?

It is important to understand that microsclerotherapy will not produce instantaneous results. For example, it will not get your legs in shape for a beach holiday in 2 weeks' time!

When you remove your compression stockings the treated veins will often look slightly worse than before due to the inflammation of the veins caused by the injections. It can take 6-8 weeks for this to start to improve. By 3 months it is usually clear which veins have been successfully treated and which ones require further treatment. For this reason I would not usually schedule further injections to the same area until 3 months have passed.

If some blood tracks back into the inflamed vein this causes a tiny clot within the vein and the vein can still appear a blue colour (this is not a deep vein thrombosis). This treated vein will improve in appearance as it becomes reabsorbed but can take a little longer to settle down. This is the reason it is important to wear the compression stockings for 2 weeks, day and night, after treatment to give the best possible results

Most veins have settled down and appear visibly much improved by 6 months but improvements in appearance continue up to 18 months following treatment.

## How many treatment sessions will I need?

This will depend on the severity of the veins on your legs and whether treatment of any underlying feeder veins is required during the treatment. For very minor areas one treatment session may be all that is required but on average 3 treatment sessions are required with a 3 month gap between treatments. More severe or extensive leg thread veins may require more sessions than this.

We will give you an indication of how many sessions you are likely to need at your initial clinic visit.

## What are the risks?

Microsclerotherapy is a safe technique but like any medical treatment there are a number of potential side effects that you need to be aware of:

a. **Skin Staining** – If some blood tracks back into a treated vein this can become trapped and due to the iron pigment in the skin a rust coloured stain can appear over the vein. If this occurs the skin stain (which looks like a bruise) will usually fade with time and resolve over 4-6 months. Occasionally the staining can be permanent. The trapped blood can be removed with a small needle after about 4 weeks and this will usually result in the area settling down a little quicker.
b. **Telangiectatic matting** – This is the formation of new very fine veins at the site of an injection. It occurs in about 5% of people treated and usually resolves by itself over a 12 month period. Matting is more likely to occur in people where an underlying feeder vein has been missed. If needed, these new veins can be treated with further microsclerotherapy or laser if the veins are very fine.
c. **Small Skin Ulcer** –This is an uncommon complication. If the sclerosant is injected into a very small skin artery a small ulcer (<1mm) may result. This is painful and will take about 8 weeks to heal leaving a small white scar.
d. **Allergic Reaction** – The sclerosant injected into the vein often causes local inflammation of the vein not to dissimilar to an insect bite but true allergic reactions are rare (1 in 4000).
e. **Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)** – Due to the dilute concentrations of sclerosants used in microsclerotherapy, this is an extremely uncommon complication with a reported incidence of around 1 in 3000.

## Are there any other treatment options?

There are a wide range of treatments that are offered for thread veins. Several websites advertise creams or dietary supplements to treat thread veins but there is no evidence that these are effective at all.

The most common procedures offered in cosmetic clinics are laser, short wave diathermy (Veinwave) and microsclerotherapy. Whilst laser and short wave diathermy are effective treatments for facial thread veins the results of these treatments for leg thread veins are disappointing. One of the reasons for this is that these treatments fail to treat the underlying feeder veins associated with leg thread veins. In addition, leg thread veins are often larger and deeper in the skin when compared to facial thread veins and therefore treatment of these with laser requires high power settings which significantly increase the risk of causing skin burns.

## Giving my consent (permission)

We want to involve you in all decisions about your care and treatment. If you decide to go ahead, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This confirms that you agree to have the procedure and understand what it involves.

We also take clinical photographs of your legs during your treatment to document your response to treatment. We will ask you to sign a separate consent form for this.