

NEEDLES AND THREADS

Mr Sudip Ray, a vascular specialist in Kingston and Wimbledon, answers some common questions about thread veins and why Spring is a popular time for treatment.

What are thread veins? Thread veins (or spider veins) are small but wiry blood vessels visible through the skin of the face or legs. They can be dark blue, red or purple, are found in 20% of 20 year olds and increase with age.

What causes thread veins? They may be inherited but often follow the hormonal changes associated with pregnancy or the pill. Sometimes they can follow trauma or bruising, and are more apparent in paler skin.

Do they need treatment? They are not medically harmful and may be hidden by fake-tan or camouflage creams. If they are extensive or distressing it may be helpful to seek specialist advice.

What is the best treatment for thread veins of the leg? Micro-sclerotherapy (injections) is probably the most effective way of dealing with these veins but there are alternatives such as thermocoagulation (Veinwave) or laser therapy. In 50% of cases there may be an underlying varicose vein which should be treated too.

How does microsclerotherapy work? A tiny needle is used to inject detergent fluid into the thread veins. They become inflamed and sticky and, over the next few weeks, seal off. Several injections can be given at the same visit and no anaesthetic is required.

Are there any side-effects from injections?

There is often a temporary inflammatory response similar to a mild insect bite which settles quickly. Occasionally the skin may become slightly pigmented or scarred at an injection site.

What is the aftercare? Following injections one can return to normal activities immediately. A stocking is usually applied for a week and plenty of walking encouraged.

When will the thread veins disappear? To begin with the veins may become discoloured but this starts to fade over the next couple of months. It is not unusual for some areas to respond faster and better than others. Overall about 80% of people have significant improvement following

injections, 10% notice only slight change, and 10% feel there has been no difference. Further injections may help those with extensive disease.

When is the best time to have thread-veins treated? If one is hoping to have improvement in time for summer it is sensible to have treatment at least three months beforehand.



Mr Sudip Ray is a Consultant Vascular Surgeon at Parkside Hospital, Wimbledon and the New Victoria Hospital.
020 3000 6900 www.endovein.co.uk