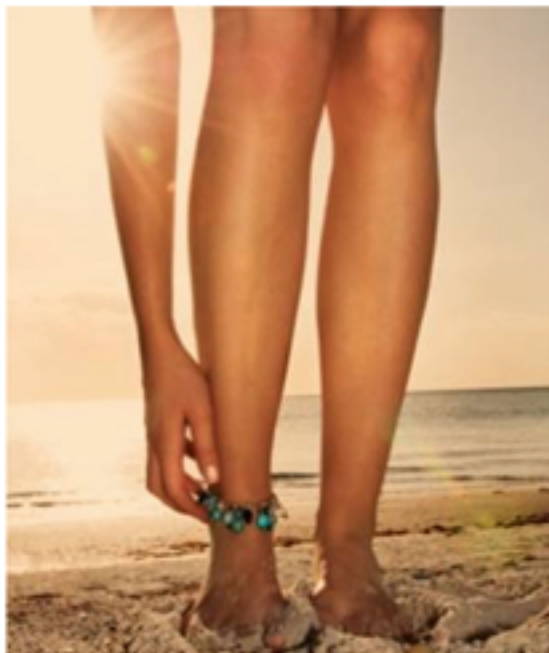


FLAWLESS SKIN: HOW TO TREAT PREMATURE SPIDER VEINS

Get beach-ready gams with these spider-vein-fighting tips

By Emily Hebert

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Spider veins aren't just a problem for Grandma—according to Luis Navarro, MD, FACS, the founder and director of the Vein Treatment Center in NYC, the spindly lines can start creeping onto your legs as early as your twenty-seventh birthday. "Around 25 percent of my patients begin seeing spider veins in their late twenties or early thirties," says the phlebologist. Here, why spider veins happen—and how to treat them in time for beach season.

Possible Causes

Veins in the calf and foot push oxygen-poor blood back to the heart and lungs and are equipped with one-way valves that prevent blood from leaking backward and collecting. When valves become weakened, however, pooled blood enlarges veins and they become varicose or spidery (varicose veins are larger and can be painful, whereas spider veins are broken capillaries just beneath the skin's surface). Besides increasing age and a genetic predisposition, Navarro says that hormonal changes, lack of exercise, and regular bouts of prolonged standing can accelerate the incidence of this vein malfunction.

"Female hormones weaken the vein wall—when you're on birth control pills your levels of estrogen or progesterin are increased, which may cause some spider veins," says Navarro, adding that "during pregnancy, you not only have more female hormones, you also have overactive hormones, a growing uterus, and increased circulating blood volume. All of these factors can put pressure on veins and cause them to enlarge." Though most pregnancy-induced spider veins and varicose veins tend to disappear within six months of delivery, the number of abnormal veins becomes higher with each additional pregnancy.

Lax leg muscles and standing for long periods of time also factor into spider-vein development. Navarro suggests strengthening leg muscles with three 20-minute workout sessions a week to improve circulation and says that such exercise is especially beneficial for those constantly on their feet: "Standing upright can stress veins because they need to push the blood against gravity from the feet all the way up to the heart."

Treatment

While varicose veins can require more invasive procedures, spider veins are often treated with sclerotherapy, a process in which a doctor injects a chemical compound into the vein to collapse it. "I'll use one solution or a combination of solutions in liquid or foam form," says Navarro. When asked about the recent FDA approval of polidocanol, a solution that's been used in Europe for years, Navarro is supportive: "It's easier to control and administer and yields excellent results with very low levels of complications such as temporary discoloration and ulceration."

In order to get gams spider-vein-free in time for the beach, Navarro says it's imperative that you book your appointment with a vein specialist now. "It can take veins time to heal post-treatment," he says. "You may develop some black-and-blue spots near the injection, which can take up to two weeks to disappear."

Prevention

Navarro reiterates that genetics is the largest indicator of spider veins but says there are certain things you can do help fight your destiny. Besides exercise, Navarro recommends the following to improve the vascular health of your legs:

- Stick to a low-salt, high-fiber diet. Salt can cause water retention and put pressure on veins.
 - Avoid tight clothing that restricts venous blood flow in your legs (stop squeezing into those superskinny, no-stretch jeans!).
 - Consult your physician about adding certain dietary supplements—butter's broom, gotu kola, and horse chestnut seed extract—to your regimen. These are traditionally believed to improve circulation and overall body functioning.
 - Elevate your legs while you sleep. Resting with legs six to eight inches above your heart is supposed to improve blood flow.
 - Get a leg massage. The next time your nail tech offers an extended leg massage with your pedi, say yes!
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