

Spider Veins *Faeza Kazmier, M.D.*

Millions of women are bothered by spider veins - those small yet unsightly clusters of red, blue or purple veins that most commonly appear on the thighs, calves and ankles. In fact, it's estimated that at least half of the adult female population is plagued with this common cosmetic problem.



Spider veins are known in the medical world as telangiectasias or sunburst varicosities. They are small, thin veins that lie close to the surface of the skin. Although these super-fine veins are connected with the larger venous system, they are not an essential part of it.

A number of factors contribute to the development of spider veins, including heredity, pregnancy and other events that cause hormonal shifts, weight gain, occupations or activities that require prolonged sitting or standing, and the use of certain medications.

Spider veins usually take on one of three basic patterns. They may appear in a true spider shape with a group of veins radiating outward from a dark central point; they may be arborizing and will resemble tiny branch-like shapes; or they may be simple linear and appear as thin separate lines. Linear spider veins are commonly seen on the inner knee, whereas the arborizing pattern often appears on the outer thigh in a sunburst or cartwheel distribution.

Varicose veins differ from spider veins in a number of ways. Varicose veins are larger - usually more than a quarter-inch in diameter, darker in color and tend to bulge. Varicose veins are also more likely to cause pain and be related to more serious vein disorders. For some patients, sclerotherapy can be used to treat varicose veins. However, often surgical treatment is necessary for this condition.

