

Ask Dr. Mikell

By Dr. Oswald Mikell

Dr. Oswald Mikell, MD • Dermatology Associates of the Lowcountry
American Board of Dermatology | American Board of Cosmetic Surgery | Physician of the Year 2008

Spider and varicose veins

Q. What is the difference between varicose and spider veins?

A. Varicose veins are enlarged veins that can be flesh colored, dark purple or blue. They often look like cords, appear twisted and bulging, and are swollen and raised above the surface of the skin. Varicose veins are commonly found on the backs of the calves or on the inside of the leg. Spider veins are a common, mild variation of varicose veins. They are found closer to the skin's surface and are often red or blue, and occur on the legs, but can also be found on the face. Spider veins vary in size and often look like a spider's web.

Q. Are spider and varicose veins serious or painful?

A. For many, spider veins are simply a cosmetic concern and usually don't cause any pain. Varicose veins on the other hand, can cause aching, cramping, restlessness, burning, throbbing, tingling, or heaviness in the legs. Severe varicose veins can lead to more serious health problems

Q. What causes spider and varicose veins?

A. Increasing age, heredity, hormonal changes such as pregnancy and menopause, or taking birth control pills and other medicines containing estrogen and progesterone can increase the risk.

Q. Is there anything I can do to help prevent spider and varicose veins?

A. There are several things that you can do to reduce your chances of getting new varicose and spider veins. These same things can help ease discomfort from the ones you already have:

- Wear Sunscreen to protect your skin from the sun and to limit spider veins on the face.
- Exercise regularly to improve your leg strength, circulation, and vein strength. Focus on exercises that work your legs, such as walking or running.
- Control your weight to avoid placing too much pressure on your legs.
- Do not cross your legs when sitting.
- Elevate your legs when resting as much as possible.
- Do not stand or sit for long periods of time. If you must stand for a long time, shift your weight from one leg to the other every few minutes. If you must sit for long periods of time, stand up and move around or take a short walk every 30 minutes.
- Wear elastic support stockings.
- Eat a low-salt diet rich in high-fiber foods.

Q. What kind of treatments are recommended?

A. Not all cases of spider and varicose veins are the same, and there are various forms of treatments. You should contact a physician - and you may want to speak with a doctor who specializes in vein diseases. Talk to your doctor about what options are best for your condition and lifestyle.

Q. How do I know if I should see a doctor?

A. Some self care may help ease discomfort and may prevent worsening, but if you're concerned about how your veins look - and you feel that self-care measures haven't stopped your condition from progressing, see a physician.

Call Dermatology Associates of the Lowcountry (843) 689-5259 for a consult.