

“Below the Belt” Dermatological Conditions Fact Sheet

When it comes to treating spider and varicose veins, cellulite and problems stemming from pedicures, there are many common myths that can steer people in the wrong direction. To help separate fact from fiction, dermatologist Robert A. Weiss, MD, FAAD, associate professor of dermatology at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, provided his expert advice.

Spider Veins

- Spider veins, also known as roadmap veins, are very tiny superficial blood vessels that increase in size over time and commonly occur on the legs.
- Women, people who have a blood relative with the condition and workers who stand regularly in their jobs are more susceptible to spider veins.
- Heredity accounts for 80 percent of people who develop spider veins.
- Tanning does not hide the appearance of spider veins. In fact, excessive sun exposure can cause spider veins since harmful ultraviolet light breaks down collagen, which composes the walls of spider veins, and can cause thinning and spreading of the veins.
- Crossing your legs does not cause spider veins.
- Gaining a lot of weight does not cause spider veins. In fact, weight loss can make a person more prone to spider veins, as it causes the skin to collapse and reveal what is underneath.
- Vitamin supplements do not prevent spider veins.
- Sclerotherapy is considered the gold standard in treating people with spider veins. This procedure allows large areas of the veins to be treated efficiently with hair-thin needles containing a sclerosing solution, which irritates the lining of the vessel causing it to swell, stick together and the blood to clot. In a matter of weeks, the vessel turns into scar tissue that eventually fades and becomes barely noticeable.

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November is National Healthy Skin Month

Varicose Veins

- Varicose veins are larger, dilated blood vessels that can be raised above the skin’s surface and have a rope-like appearance.
- Most varicose veins stem from a hidden vein trunk beneath the skin’s surface that must be treated for any procedure to be successful.
- Laser therapy is one of the latest treatments for varicose veins, in which tiny laser fibers are delivered to the vein through a needle puncture that is thread up to the main vein trunk responsible for these veins.
- Another new therapy for treating varicose veins is radiofrequency. During this procedure, radiofrequency energy converted to heat is used to collapse the vein – which is then reabsorbed by the body.

Cellulite

- Cellulite is a hormonally based condition unique to women. It is caused by a herniation or rupture of fat through the fibrous tissue and the subsequent pulling back of this tissue that creates dimpled areas.
- Although liposuction removes excess fat, it does not improve the appearance of cellulite. In fact, liposuction can make the appearance of cellulite worse by creating more depressions in the skin.
- New therapies using lasers and light sources are currently being studied to treat cellulite.
 - One procedure involves using a large panel of red and infrared Light Emitting Diodes (LEDs) to emit certain wavelengths known to soften and disrupt fat tissue, which causes them to shrink. This procedure is combined with rollers and suction to soften the fibrous bands that are pulling the skin back and causing cellulite.

Pedicures

- If proper sanitation is overlooked, pedicures can pose serious health risks for nail salon patrons – including fungal infections and antibiotic-resistant staph infections, such as Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or MRSA.
- To minimize the risk of infection, consumers should ask nail technicians how their instruments are cleaned and to avoid any salons that don’t appear clean. For those who regularly get pedicures, they should consider buying their own instruments to use at the salon to further minimize their risk of contracting an infection.

- The cuticle is the nail’s protective barrier and should not be pushed back, which can damage it and increase a person’s risk of infection. Smoothing the surface of the nail too aggressively with nail files and buffers at the base of the nail also can damage the cuticle.
- The best way to avoid being misled by myths concerning skin, hair or nails is to discuss any questions or concerns with a dermatologist.

For more information on skin, hair and nail conditions, visit the American Academy of Dermatology’s Web site at www.aad.org.

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