

GETTING A LEG UP

Problem veins can be more than just a cosmetic concern. If left undiagnosed and untreated, leaky leg veins may lead to serious adverse changes in the health of leg skin and possible bleeding or skin ulceration from bulging varicosities.

Of the estimated 35 million adult Americans who suffer from venous insufficiency, or vein disease, many are focused solely on its visual or cosmetic impact. However, when patients have these symptoms treated cosmetically without regard to their underlying cause, symptoms may return. When vessel walls weaken and valves stretch, veins become distended, allowing blood to pool in affected areas. This can result in swollen ankles, clusters of tiny blue veins, purple-tinged feet, and tangled, bumpy veins beneath the skin, all of which might be considered unattractive. Because many recent, individualized, and technologically advanced therapies are available to actually treat venous disease and to avoid later complications, *Florida Health Care News* turns to vein specialist Joseph G. Magnant, MD, FACS, a board-certified vascular surgeon, to learn more about venous disease.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DR. MAGNANT

or hormonal variations and are therefore most commonly found in women. They can effectively be treated with injection sclerotherapy or laser sclerotherapy.

Is there a medical reason to address spider veins? If a patient has diffuse spider veins and symptoms of leg swelling and pain, we want to be sure it is not the veins underneath that are causing the spider veins. As a vascular surgeon, my approach to venous disease is to consider vein issues from the inside out. Rather than simply considering what is visible, I look deeper to ensure that the larger veins are working properly. Typically, the *saphenous* veins — the ones underneath the skin and fat but outside the muscle — are the veins that cause patients most problems. The spider



Joseph G. Magnant, MD, is a fellow of the American College of Surgeons and is board-certified by the American Board of Surgery in vascular surgery. He earned his undergraduate degree from Virginia Polytechnic

Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA, and his medical degree from Medical College of Virginia. He completed a general surgery residency at Medical College of Virginia Hospitals and a fellowship in vascular surgery at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, Lebanon, NH. He opened Vein Specialists at Royal Palm Square after 14 years as the lead vascular surgeon in a large, multispecialty clinic outside of Atlanta, GA. He is a registered vascular technologist and is certified in advanced cardiac life support and is an active member of the American College of Phlebology, Society for Vascular Surgery, and Southern Association of Vascular Surgery.

What is your recommendation for patients with symptoms of venous disease? Today we recommend that patients are proactively evaluated and then treated when appropriate by an experienced board-certified vascular surgeon with a strong dedication to venous evaluation and treatment. At Vein Specialists at Royal Palm Square we specialize in the treatment of veins: everything from spider veins and swollen, achy legs to ropey varicose veins, purple, discolored skin, and leg ulcers. Our entire focus is on our patients — their veins and overall well-being. **FHCN**

Kris Kline, a staff writer at Florida Health Care News, conducted this interview with Dr. Magnant.

Smooth out your problem veins
Dr. Magnant welcomes all calls regarding this article as well as other topics related to veins. His office is located at 1510 Royal Palm Square Blvd., Suite 101, in Fort Myers. Please phone (239) 694-VEIN(8346) for more information or to schedule an appointment.



FAQs

Dr. Magnant, will you please explain to our readers what is meant by varicose veins? Varicose veins are dilated, abnormally appearing veins usually found in the legs. Healthy leg veins usually have a series of valves that open in one direction, allowing for flow in a segmental fashion up toward the heart. When the valves no longer close tightly, venous blood refluxes back down toward the feet, resulting in increased pressure in the leg veins, which can lead to leg swelling and aching, skin discoloration, and leg ulcerations. This

condition is often referred to as *venous insufficiency* or *incompetence*.

Are spider veins the same thing as varicose veins? Spider veins, also referred to as *telangiectasias*, are tiny dilated blood vessels in the skin that become swollen with stagnant blood. Technically they are very small varicose veins. They can be related to pregnancy



veins or blue veins that are visible can be a signal that veins underneath are leaking.

How would you determine if something is leaking? We rely heavily on ultrasound evaluation of our patients' veins. With ultrasound, which may be covered by our patients' health insurance, we can determine whether or not there are any problems in the saphenous veins or deeper veins. If we find leakiness there, it would be appropriate to address that before patients receive treatment for their spider veins. This approach both prevents further complications and allows for more effective treatment of the visible spider veins. If the underlying problems are not remedied, injection sclerotherapy treatments will likely fail over time.

Along with visual, cosmetic complaints, what are some of the other symptoms with which patients might present? Some patients have swollen feet and ankles, achy legs, leg ulcers, persistent itching over the affected area, or a feeling of tiredness, especially at the end of the day. Several of my patients also describe restlessness in the affected leg during the night, which subsides once the varicose veins are treated. I would encourage patients with restless legs syndrome and varicose veins to undergo evaluation by a vein specialist.



Dr. Magnant's steps to healthy legs*

- MAINTAIN A PROPER WEIGHT**
Even moderate weight loss may reduce aching in the legs due to varicose veins and diminish the rate at which spider veins develop.
- AVOID HIGH HEELS**
Wearing high heels interferes with the normal pumping action by the calf muscles of the blood flow that occurs when you walk and may lead to aching and cramping of the legs.
- ELEVATE YOUR LEGS**
Elevating your legs above the level of the collarbone for 10 minutes once or twice daily may diminish aching and swelling. Placement of a 2 x 4 block under the foot of the bed may also assist in reducing swelling.
- MOVE YOUR LEGS FREQUENTLY**
Flexing your ankles 10 times will pump the blood out of your legs like walking

- does. Repeat this every 10 minutes while standing or sitting and try to walk for at least 2 minutes every half hour.
- WEAR SUPPORT HOSE**
Support hose are available at Vein Specialists at Royal Palm Square and other medical supply stores. Lighter support stockings are available at department stores. However, it is best to wear a stocking that is labeled *graduated*, as this will benefit your vein function most.
- REGULAR EXERCISE**
Walking
Running
Stairmaster
Aerobics
Swimming
Biking
Thirty minutes 5 to 7 days a week will help reduce aching, pain, and tiredness in your legs.

*Information provided by Vein Specialists at Royal Palm Square

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