PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

SPIDER ANGIOMA

WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF THIS LEAFLET?

This leaflet has been written to help you understand more about spider angiomas. It tells you what this condition is, what causes it, what can be done about it, and where you can find out more about it.

WHAT IS SPIDER ANGIOMA?

A spider angioma is an enlarged blood vessel in the skin (resembling the body of a spider), from which smaller blood vessels extend (resembling the spider's legs).

Spider angioma is also known as 'naevus araneus', 'vascular spider', 'arterial spider', 'spider telangiectasia' and 'spider naevus/nevus'. These names mean:

- *araneus* for spider
- *angioma* for blood vessel
- *telangiectasia* for enlarged blood vessel.

Naevus means an increase in number of normal or healthy cells within the skin.

WHAT CAUSES SPIDER ANGIOMAS?

The cause of spider angiomas is not known. The vast majority affect healthy people, and most people have only one spider angioma or just a few.

Spider angiomas may appear when the body has higher levels of the hormone oestrogen. This could be due to pregnancy or when taking the oral contraceptive pill. They may also occasionally occur in people with liver or thyroid disease.

Spider angiomas can develop at any age but are more common in children.

ARE SPIDER ANGIOMAS HEREDITARY?

Spider angiomas are very common and affect at least one in ten healthy adults and are even more common in children. They do not run in families.

Spider angiomas are not contagious or cancerous.

WHAT DO SPIDER ANGIOMAS FEEL AND LOOK LIKE?

Apart from its appearance, a spider angioma does not usually cause any symptoms. Bleeding from spider angioma is unusual but may occur if picked or scratched.

A spider angioma has a small central red area , which may be raised. From its centre, smaller red blood vessels radiate outwards.

Briefly pressing onto a spider angioma will make it disappear. On releasing the pressure, it will refill, returning the red colour.

Spider angiomas may measure up to a centimetre in diameter.

Most spider angiomas are on the face, upper chest, back and upper arms. In children, the backs of the hands are also often affected.

HOW IS SPIDER ANGIOMA DIAGNOSED?

A spider angioma is diagnosed visually by its characteristic appearance.

CAN SPIDER ANGIOMAS BE CURED?

Spider angiomas do not usually need treatment.

In children and some adults, spider angiomas may go away on their own. This can take several years.

If spider angiomas develop during pregnancy or while taking the contraceptive pill, they may fade once hormone levels return to their usual levels. This often happens within

about 9 months after pregnancy or after stopping the contraceptive pill.

Treatment can remove spider angiomas completely. However, more than one treatment may be needed. In some people, spider angiomas can come back months after treatment.

HOW CAN SPIDER ANGIOMA BE TREATED?

Spider angiomas are usually of cosmetic concern only and are not usually treated by the National Health Service

A vascular laser such as the pulsed dye laser, NdYAG or KTP laser can target the blood in the central small artery, causing it to shrink.

In cosmetic clinics, the central artery can be treated with an electric current ('electrodessication'), causing it to dry up.

These treatments may briefly hurt or sting but do not usually need any local anaesthetic. They may leave a small permanent scar like a dent in the skin, which is less common after laser treatment than after electrodessication.

About a third of spider angiomas persist and further treatment may be required.

Cosmetic **skin camouflage** can be useful if there are many spider angiomas which are causing visible concern. Skin camouflage is a water-resistant type of special make-up. It is tailored to match the colour of the person's skin

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SPIDER ANGIOMA?

Patient support groups providing information:

Changing Faces
Tel: 0300 012 0276
Email: skincam@changingfaces.org.uk
Web: www.changingfaces.org.uk

N.B. Skin camouflage services are available in Wales, for Welsh residents only:

www.changingfaces.org.uk/services-support/skin-camouflage-service/register-interest-skin-camouflage/

Weblinks to other relevant sources:

DernNetNZ:
dermnetnz.org/vascular/angioma.html

Patient Info:
https://patient.info/doctor/dermatology/spider-naevus

Jargon Buster:
www.skinhealthinfo.org.uk/support-resources/jargon-buster/

This leaflet aims to provide accurate information about the subject and is a consensus of the views held by representatives of the British Association of Dermatologists: individual patient circumstances may differ, which might alter both the advice and course of therapy given to you by your doctor.

This leaflet has been assessed for readability by the British Association of Dermatologists' Patient Information Lay Review Panel

BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF DERMATOLOGISTS

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