

Facial Telangiectasia and the Candela V Beam Laser

Facial telangiectasia refers to dilated blood vessels on the face, commonly called “broken capillaries”. The vessels may be widespread over the cheeks, nose and chin, or localized in a cluster. They may be a sign of rosacea or occur with sun damage.

How does pulsed dye laser treat facial telangiectasia?

The pulsed dye laser emits light of wavelength 595nm. This is specifically absorbed by oxyhaemoglobin in blood, generating heat within blood vessels. This damages the vessels and the body then gradually removes them. Because the heat stays within the blood vessels, the surrounding tissues are not damaged and scarring is rare.

How is the laser treatment done?

The laser treatment is quick and no form of anaesthetic is usually required for adults. It is an uncomfortable sensation, but not extremely painful.

Eyes will be covered with lead shields, but a bright flash of light may still be visible. For a few days after the procedure the face may feel swollen and may look slightly red, but this isn't usually noticeable to others. Occasionally there may be a greyish purple spot if a large vessel has required more than one pulse. Good sun protection is needed during the healing phase. The beneficial effects are not immediate and may take 6-8 weeks to become evident.

How many treatments are required?

On average 3 treatments are required, but this does depend upon the individual. It is better to treat gently and repeat than to treat too aggressively. The treatments are spaced at 8 weekly intervals but it doesn't matter if the gap is longer. Large vessels around the nose can be stubborn and may take more treatments to clear.

Do the vessels come back?

Vessels that have been cleared do not recur, but new vessels certainly may develop over time.

Is pulsed dye laser safe?

Scarring is extremely rare and usually only seen if the healing skin becomes infected or is traumatized. Skin darkening (hyperpigmentation) can occur in the treated areas but usually fades over a matter of weeks. It is more common in patients with olive or dark skin tones and can become worse if the laser treated area is exposed to the sun. Rarely the skin may lighten (hypopigmentation), but these areas usually repigment in 2-4 months. In some patients there may be a slightly spotty appearance after one treatment, due to the untreated vessels between the laser pulses. This appearance disappears with a repeat treatment. The laser only penetrates 1.2mm into the skin so does not damage deeper structures. The laser treated area does not become more prone to skin cancers.

Is any after care required?

A cold damp cloth is placed on the skin immediately after the procedure. It is worth continuing to pat a cold cloth against the face for as long as possible, as this minimizes swelling the next day. Make up can be applied any time after the procedure.

Does Medicare consider this laser to be cosmetic?

Unlike intense pulsed light (IPL), there is a Medicare item number for pulsed dye laser treatments used for marked redness of the face and neck (visible from a distance of 3m). The out of pocket expense for each treatment varies between \$170 and \$300, depending upon the area treated.