

Spider Naevi and Laser

A spider naevus is a harmless spot that has a large central feeding blood vessel and many tiny blood vessels radiating from the centre. The cause is unknown, although at times they follow trauma. They can clear spontaneously but it may take many years. They certainly don't have to be treated but they can be unsightly, particularly when prominent on the face.

How does laser work?

The laser emits light of wavelength 595nm. This is absorbed by oxyhaemoglobin in blood, creating heat inside 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.

Is laser effective?

90% of spider naevi clear with a single treatment, the remainder requiring a second treatment after 8 weeks. Rarely, a third treatment may be required.

Is laser safe?

It is an extremely safe procedure with a very low incidence of complications. With olive skin there may be a slight colour change (the skin can go lighter or darker for 3-4 weeks) but this is rarely noticeable.

What is the procedure?

The treatment only takes a few seconds. For young children EMLA numbing cream can be applied (a 5g tube can be purchased without a prescription) thickly 1-2 hours beforehand, covering the cream with Tegaderm. A slight sting will be experienced, which lasts 2-3 minutes. The spot will turn purple and this will last about a week. The main aftercare is to use good sun protection and prevent direct trauma to the area.

Does Medicare consider the treatment cosmetic?

There is a Medicare item number for prominent spider naevi on the head and neck, but not for lesions on the arms or elsewhere.