

## [Ask The Expert]



By NEIL ALAN FENSKE, M.D.  
Tribune correspondent

Are you embarrassed by large red-dish-blue blood vessels running along your nose or by veins on your cheeks and chin creating an unsightly road map to nowhere?

Until relatively recently, treatment for facial veins was a long, sometimes painful process involving needles and other invasive procedures. New laser technology now allows physicians to successfully treat unsightly veins simply and non-invasively.

Often referred to as "broken vessels," enlarged blood vessels are actually permanently dilated or distended, not broken. The most common causes are chronic sun damage; rosacea, a skin condition in which vessels are weak and prone to dilation; and routine application of some corticosteroids for skin conditions, such as seborrheic dermatitis.

These vessels can be covered up with a heavier, more opaque makeup such as Dermablend® Cover Cream. This is an inexpensive solution for women, who are used to applying cosmetics, but not a suggestion typically well-received by men.

New light-based technologies offer a more permanent solution for men and women. Enlarged facial vessels can be destroyed by exposing them to short pulses of light. The light is absorbed by red blood cells flowing through the vessels, creating heat that damages the inner lining of the vessels. The vessels then contract as microscopic scars form.

Light-based systems on the market range from a few thousand dollars to hundreds of thousands of dollars with variable effectiveness, risk and provider restrictions. How does a consumer determine which device or treatment will work best? A good rule of thumb is to seek out those who typically receive specialized training with this equipment during their education — namely board-certified dermatologists and plastic surgeons. It's one thing to be disappointed by a lack of visible improvement and quite another to

end up with scarring or other adverse effects.

I see many patients who have undergone several procedures at a modest price with no improvement. Many patients report they received "laser treatment," but after careful inquiry I find they were actually the recipients of Intense Pulsed Light. IPLs are not lasers — they emit a broad spectrum of disorganized light that is not very effective at removing larger, more distinct vessels. Instead, they are very useful for treating generalized redness, discoloration and very tiny, barely visible vessels. If the IPL device is the only unit in the office, this is likely what you will be offered by a health provider.

In my experience using IPL devices and many different lasers, the best outcome is with lasers. Lasers are more expensive, sophisticated devices engineered to emit a single, highly organized wavelength of light, designed to be absorbed by a specific pigment. Even among lasers, one size does not fit all. Only some of the countless lasers are effective for treating enlarged facial vessels. A laser designed for hair or tattoo removal may not work for blood vessels. One designed for small superficial veins may not be powerful enough for larger, deeper vessels.

Cosmetic procedures are a very lucrative "cash business," which occasionally leads to overzealous use of existing office equipment, even if it's not the ideal instrument or, worse yet, ineffective. Consumers considering facial vein removal need to do their homework. Generally, an office or clinic offering many different cosmetic procedures uses the greatest variety of light-based systems, including vascular lasers.

Dr. Fenske is professor and chairman of the Department of Dermatology and Cutaneous Surgery at USF Health.

# How Do You Treat Ugly Facial Veins?

