CONDITION

# Spider angioma

A spider angioma is a small cluster of widened skin blood vessels around a central red spot.

**WHAT IT IS**
Widened skin blood vessels around a central red spot

**BODY SYSTEM**
Skin and blood vessels

**MAIN SYMPTOMS**
Red spot, radiating vessels, blanching, occasional bleeding

**WHAT CAUSES IT**
Vessel widening, sometimes linked to hormones or liver disease

**HOW IT IS DIAGNOSED**
Skin examination, sometimes dermoscopy

**MAIN TREATMENT**
Reassurance, cosmetic removal, or treating an underlying cause

**CAN IT BE CURED?**
Sometimes - lesions can clear or be removed

**IS IT AN EMERGENCY?**
No - the lesion itself is usually harmless

**LONG-TERM OUTLOOK**
Usually harmless; may persist, fade, or return

## Overview

A spider angioma is a small cluster of widened blood vessels that can be seen through the skin. It has a central red spot with fine red lines spreading outward, giving it a spider-like appearance.

The central spot is a tiny artery. The "legs" are smaller blood vessels carrying blood away from it. When pressure is placed over the centre, the whole mark usually fades. It then fills again from the centre when the pressure is released.

Spider angiomas are benign, meaning they are not cancer. A single lesion is common in otherwise healthy children and adults. They can also appear during pregnancy or while using medicines that contain oestrogen.

Having several spider angiomas can sometimes be associated with an underlying condition,

particularly long-term liver disease. The number, location, and timing of the lesions help determine whether further assessment may be useful.

## Symptoms

A spider angioma is usually painless and does not itch. It is generally flat or only slightly raised.

Typical features include:

Most are a few millimetres across, although some are larger. They commonly occur on the face, neck, upper chest, shoulders, arms, and hands. In adults with liver disease, they often appear on the upper half of the body.

The colour can be more noticeable after exercise, in warm conditions, or when blood flow to the skin increases. A lesion may occasionally bleed if it is scratched, shaved over, or otherwise injured.

Other skin marks can look similar. These include cherry angiomas, which are rounded red growths, and other forms of telangiectasia, the medical term for visible widened blood vessels.

- A central red or purple spot
- Thin blood vessels spreading outward
- Temporary fading when the centre is pressed
- Refilling from the centre after pressure is released

## Causes and risk factors

A spider angioma forms when a small artery near the skin widens. Blood then flows into the fine vessels spreading from it. The exact reason this happens is not always known.

One or a few lesions may occur without any underlying illness. They are often seen in healthy children and may fade as the child gets older.

Hormonal changes can encourage blood vessels to widen. Spider angiomas may therefore develop during pregnancy or while using oestrogen-containing medicines. Pregnancy-related lesions often become less noticeable after childbirth, although they do not always disappear.

Several lesions may be associated with chronic liver disease, especially cirrhosis. Cirrhosis is permanent scarring that interferes with how the liver works. Changes in hormone processing and blood-vessel signalling may contribute to spider angiomas in this setting.

Other reported associations include an overactive thyroid and, less commonly, certain

inflammatory or nutritional conditions. A spider angioma alone does not show that any of these conditions is present.

Factors that may affect whether further testing is considered include:

- A sudden increase in the number of lesions
- Several lesions appearing in an adult
- Symptoms that could suggest liver or thyroid problems
- Heavy alcohol use or a known history of liver disease
- Use of hormonal medicines or pregnancy

## Diagnosis

A healthcare professional can usually identify a spider angioma by examining the skin. Its pattern and response to pressure are often enough to make the diagnosis.

During the examination, pressure may be applied to the central spot with a finger or a clear instrument. A typical lesion becomes pale and then refills from the centre outward. This helps distinguish it from some other red or purple marks.

A dermatoscope may be used if the appearance is unclear. This is a handheld magnifying device with a light that allows the blood-vessel pattern to be examined more closely.

Tests are not normally needed for one typical lesion in an otherwise well person. If several lesions have appeared or there are other concerning symptoms, blood tests may be used to check liver function, thyroid function, and blood counts. These tests assess possible underlying causes; they do not diagnose the skin lesion itself.

A skin biopsy is rarely needed. This involves removing a small sample for examination under a microscope. It may be considered if the mark has unusual features or the diagnosis remains uncertain.

## Treatment and management

Most spider angiomas do not need treatment. They are harmless, and leaving them alone does not cause them to become cancerous.

If a lesion developed during pregnancy, a period of observation may be reasonable because it may fade after childbirth. Lesions in children may also become less visible over time.

When spider angiomas are linked to another condition, managing that condition is more

important than removing the skin marks. The lesions may fade if the underlying problem improves, but this is not guaranteed. Do not stop a prescribed hormonal medicine because of a skin mark without discussing it with the prescriber.

A lesion can be treated for cosmetic reasons or because repeated trauma makes it bleed. Options may include:

These treatments target or close the central blood vessel. More than one session may be needed. The lesion can return if the vessel reopens or another one develops nearby.

Possible treatment effects include temporary redness, swelling, bruising, blistering, or changes in skin colour. Scarring is possible but uncommon when treatment is performed appropriately. The risk of colour changes can be more important in darker skin tones, so treatment should be selected with this in mind.

Do not try to cut, burn, puncture, or remove a spider angioma at home. This can cause bleeding, infection, and scarring.

- Vascular laser treatment, such as a pulsed-dye laser
- Intense pulsed light treatment
- Electrocautery, which uses controlled heat to seal the vessel

## Complications

A spider angioma usually causes no medical complications. The main concern for many people is its appearance, especially when it is on the face or another visible area.

A lesion can bleed after shaving, scratching, or another minor injury. Steady pressure with clean material will usually control this. Repeated bleeding may be a reason to consider removal.

Cosmetic treatment can cause pigment changes or a small scar. A treated lesion may also return.

The most important issue is not usually the angioma itself, but whether several new lesions are a sign of an underlying condition. In someone with liver disease, spider angiomas may occur alongside jaundice, abdominal swelling, easy bruising, or other signs that the liver is not working normally.

## Prevention

There is no reliable way to prevent an isolated spider angioma. Many occur without a clear

cause, and pregnancy-related hormonal changes cannot always be avoided.

Skin creams, supplements, and dietary changes have not been shown to prevent these lesions. Sunscreen is useful for general skin protection, but it does not guarantee that spider angiomas will not form.

Avoiding heavy alcohol use and reducing the risk of viral hepatitis can help protect the liver, but these steps do not specifically prevent every spider angioma. People with known liver disease can reduce complications by following their planned care and attending routine monitoring.

Avoiding repeated rubbing or shaving directly over a lesion may reduce bleeding. This protects an existing lesion rather than preventing it.

## Living with it and what to expect

A solitary spider angioma may remain unchanged for months or years. It may also become lighter or disappear without treatment. These changes are difficult to predict.

In children, lesions often become less noticeable with age. Those associated with pregnancy may fade in the months after childbirth. If a lesion persists, it can still remain harmless.

Spider angiomas associated with chronic liver disease may persist unless liver health improves. New lesions may continue to appear. Their presence does not by itself show how severe the liver condition is, so other symptoms, blood tests, and medical assessments matter more.

After cosmetic treatment, the area usually needs time to settle. Temporary redness or bruising can occur. Even when treatment works well, the same lesion may return or a new one may form elsewhere.

Most people with one or two typical lesions need no limits on work, exercise, travel, or daily activities. The marks are not contagious and cannot spread to another person through contact.

## When to get medical help

Arrange a routine appointment if:

Seek prompt medical assessment if spider angiomas appear with yellow skin or eyes, persistent abdominal swelling, unexplained weight loss, marked tiredness, easy bruising, or dark urine. These symptoms do not prove that liver disease is present, but they should be assessed.

Get emergency help for vomiting blood, black tar-like stools, severe confusion, fainting, or bleeding that is heavy or will not stop with firm pressure. These are not usual features of a spider angioma and may signal a more serious problem.

- Several spider angiomas have appeared without a clear reason
- The number is increasing over weeks or months
- A mark repeatedly bleeds or catches on clothing
- The diagnosis is uncertain or the appearance is changing
- You want to discuss cosmetic treatment
- You have known liver disease and notice new skin changes

## Common questions

Does one spider angioma mean I have liver disease?

Usually not. A single lesion is common in healthy people, including children and pregnant people. Several new lesions, especially with other symptoms, may lead to tests for an underlying cause.

Is a spider angioma cancer?

No. A typical spider angioma is a benign cluster of widened blood vessels. A mark that grows quickly, develops an irregular shape, forms an open sore, or looks unlike a typical lesion should be examined because other conditions can look similar.

Can a spider angioma go away by itself?

Yes, it can. Lesions in children or during pregnancy may fade over time. Others remain visible for years. It is not possible to predict with certainty whether an individual lesion will disappear.

How can I remove a spider angioma?

A healthcare professional may use a vascular laser, intense pulsed light, or controlled heat treatment. Removal is usually cosmetic unless the lesion repeatedly bleeds. Recurrence is possible.

Can I pop or squeeze it?

No. It is a blood vessel, not a spot containing pus or fluid. Squeezing, puncturing, or cutting it can cause bleeding, infection, and scarring.

Why did several spider angiomas suddenly appear?

Possible reasons include pregnancy, hormonal medicines, thyroid changes, or chronic liver

disease. Sometimes no cause is found. A routine assessment is appropriate if several appear over a short period.

## Sources

- DermNet New Zealand - Spider telangiectasis
- Cleveland Clinic - Spider Angioma
- National Library of Medicine, StatPearls - Spider Angioma
- American Academy of Family Physicians - Cirrhosis: Diagnosis and Management
- Merck Manual Consumer Version - Cirrhosis of the Liver