



Mishpacha family

FIRST

LOOKING BEYOND LIMITATIONS

A Shadchan With A Difference

THE MIDDLE-AGED MOTHERS' CLUB

Having Children After 40:
The Challenge And The Cheer

HALACHAH CENTRAL: COMING OF AGE

When Must Kids Stop Doing ...?

DOUGHNUTS AND DREIDELS

Getting Into The Kislev Spirit

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SUPPLEMENT TO MISHPACHA, JEWISH FAMILY WEEKLY



Help! I'm in my early twenties, have never been pregnant, and I have spider veins.



Right now they're annoying because they're unsightly, but I'm afraid they'll develop into varicose veins, especially since there's a strong family history of varicose veins. Is there anything I can do to reduce their appearance and prevent them from getting worse?

Responding is Kevin Jovanovic, MD, FACOG, AACS, an Associate Professor of OB/GYN at Lenox Hill Hospital. He trained in OB/GYN at Yale University School of Medicine and attended medical school at Albert Einstein College of Medicine. He is a Fellow of the American College of OB/GYN, Associate Fellow of the College of Surgeons, and Associate of the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery. In his practice at Manhattan Laser Center for Vein Treatment, on Fifth Avenue in New York, he provides a full array of women's medical and cosmetic services.

Spider veins, or telangiectasias, are extremely common. They are the small red or blue veins right beneath the skin. Some estimates are that fifty percent or more women will have spider veins at adulthood. They are more common in the legs on the thigh, calf, or ankles. They can resemble a tree (arborizing) or can be in a sunburst pattern (arise from a common point). They are caused by pregnancy, heredity, weight gain, and prolonged sitting or standing. There seems to be a hormonal link — that is why it is more common in women.

You mentioned that you are concerned that your current spider veins could some day lead to varicose veins, which are much more problematic. You are right! The spider veins may be a sign that there is damage beneath the skin. A thorough exam and ultrasound will determine if you're already at increased risk for more severe varicose disease in the future. The treatments are dependent on the extent of disease. If there are no additional damaged veins, the usual treatment for spider veins can be either sclerotherapy or laser therapy. Sclerotherapy is the injection of medication into the vein to close damaged veins and is thought to be more effective than laser alone. A visit to a physician will help determine if the spider veins are cosmetic or a sign of greater vascular disease.

If you do not visit the doctor, limiting the amount of time on your feet and using support stockings will help, but not cure, your spider veins. Elevation of your feet during work and at night (placing a pillow under your feet in bed) limits the pressure on the veins. Compressions stockings graded 30/40 mmHg are the best at helping to relieve the pressure of the blood in your legs while you are standing.

healthtip

Chronic headaches are common in childhood, experienced by anywhere from ten to twenty-five percent of all children. The more overweight children and teenagers are, the more frequent and disabling their headaches, according to the first national study to look at possible links between obesity and headaches in kids. A great payoff of slimming down is that heavy kids tend to gain some relief from headaches, says Andrew Hershey, a pediatric neurologist at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, who led the study at seven US headache centers. Overweight children who lost weight reported about half as many headaches as the heavy kids who continued to gain weight. Children of normal weight saw no reduction in headaches from losing weight.

didyouknow?

There seems to be a gene for everything, and researchers have now identified a gene responsible for how yummy a food will taste to you. Turns out, a healthy diet and plenty of exercise are main factors in whether someone is overweight or not, but that's not all. Overweight people may be overeating to compensate for a lack of pleasure derived from tasting the food, a brain reaction to dopamine that is entirely subconscious. If doctors could determine who carries this at-risk gene, such individuals could be steered towards increased exercise and other activities to increase the level of dopamine that they aren't receiving from eating foods.

