

Laser Removal of Blood Vessels

Krauss Dermatology

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1. What types of lesions can be treated with laser?

The VBeam Platinum® pulsed dye laser (by Candela) is the most effective instrument for removing spider veins (small dilated vessels) from the face, and cherry angiomas (small red spots) from the face and body. These lesions often clear with only one or two treatments. The Pulsed Dye Laser can also help fade, over the course of multiple treatments, red or raised scars, “port wine stain” birthmarks, and red discoloration of the face from rosacea. Although leg veins respond better to sclerotherapy, laser can be used to treat vessels that are too small for sclerotherapy. All of these conditions, with the possible exception of some facial birthmarks or bleeding lesions, are considered cosmetic and are not covered by insurance.

2. How does the laser work?

The Pulsed Dye Laser emits a burst of light tuned precisely to target the red pigment in blood and blood vessels without harming other parts of the skin. Therefore, this laser can remove dilated blood vessels while leaving the surrounding skin intact. A brief pulse of a cold spray precedes the pulse of light, further protecting the skin from injury.

3. Does treatment hurt?

Each pulse of light feels like the snapping of a small rubber band, while the cool spray of the laser minimizes this brief discomfort. A topical numbing cream may further decrease discomfort. Topicalaine, a very effective anesthetic gel, may be purchased in our office. Alternatively, LMX 4 or 5% cream (which is slightly more expensive than Topicalaine) may be ordered from your pharmacy without a prescription. Apply a generous amount of Topicalaine or LMX 30 minutes before your appointment and rub into the skin. Repeat this application after you check in for your appointment.

4. What does the skin look like after treatment?

Each pulse of light treats approximately the size of a pencil eraser. These spots often turn pink to slightly red. Occasionally, small areas may turn a purple or blue color that can last for about a week. You may want to schedule the treatment at a time when you don't have major social or work commitments for 2-3 days until the redness, and occasionally swelling, go down. Cover makeup can generally be used after 24 hours.

5. What are the risks?

Complications of treatment with the pulsed dye laser are uncommon. Dark discoloration (hyperpigmentation) of the treated area is unlikely to occur and would fade over months; however, it is important to avoid sun exposure after treatment to minimize this risk. Light discoloration (hypopigmentation) and scarring are extremely rare, unless you have recently taken a medication called Accutane for acne (within 6 months). Bruising can occur, but generally resolves in about a week. It is important to follow instructions regarding aspirin and ibuprofen in order to avoid bruising. Laser light cannot penetrate deeper than the skin and will not harm internal organs, but goggles must be worn to protect the eyes. Some lesions may not be completely cleared by the treatment, requiring more treatments at additional cost.

Patient Instructions for Laser Vessel Treatment

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Pre-Treatment Instructions

1. Avoid sun exposure or tanning for one month prior to treatment. Tanned skin can shade blood vessels from the laser light, making treatment less effective and increasing the chance of discoloration.
2. Avoid taking aspirin for 10 days prior to the procedure. Do not take ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil or related products like Aleve, Naprosyn) for 5 days prior to the procedure. Avoid alcoholic beverages for 2 days prior. You may take Tylenol, which will not affect your laser results.
3. Do not scrub or traumatize the skin to be treated. Do not use Retin A, Renova or glycolic acid products for 2 days before treatment.
4. A topical numbing cream may decrease discomfort from the procedure. Topicalaine, a very effective anesthetic gel, may be purchased in our office. Alternatively, LMX 4 or 5% cream (which is slightly more expensive than Topicalaine) may be ordered from your pharmacy without a prescription. Apply a generous amount of Topicalaine or LMX 30 minutes before your appointment and rub into the skin. Repeat this application after you check in for your appointment.

Post-Treatment Instructions

1. The treated area may be slightly red, with mild soreness like a sunburn for a few hours to two days. These symptoms, if they occur, can be relieved using soft ice packs and Tylenol. If a large facial area has been treated, you may experience swelling. If this occurs, keep your head elevated, and prop it up on several pillows at night.
2. For a week after the treatment, the treated may have some small blue to purple spots. Make-up may be applied *very gently* starting the day after treatment. Makeup with a green or yellow tint can be especially helpful in neutralizing the any purple or blue discoloration.
3. Cleanse the treated area gently, and apply Vaseline jelly or Aquaphor ointment once or twice a day until the skin returns to its normal color. Use moisturizer with sunscreen when going outdoors. Take lukewarm, not hot, showers, and avoid strenuous exercise for two days.
4. Do not, under any circumstances, pick or rub the treated areas even if a scab forms (which is very rare).
5. Avoid taking aspirin or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) and avoid alcoholic beverages for 7 days after the procedure. You may take Tylenol, which will not affect your laser results.
6. Strictly avoid sun exposure for at least a month after treatment to minimize the risk of dark discoloration in the treated skin. Use sunscreen of spf 30 or higher, preferably containing zinc oxide or titanium dioxide, and a hat or sunprotective clothing.