

BEAUTY

Love Your Legs

Pro solutions for soft, smooth skin

BY VICTORIA KIRBY

When those first itchy-bitsy spider veins or thigh dimples show up, you might be happy to look the other way. But if those types of changes start to bother you, there are solutions. In the past, cosmetic leg treatments were lengthy and painful; today, however, most can be done in under an hour with little to no pain. Here's what to consider, and a few camouflage tricks that work on everyone.

MAKE VEINS VANISH

Contrary to popular belief, crossing your legs often or being on your feet all day won't give you spider veins (which are under the skin) or varicose veins (which are raised). Pregnancy, exercise, or injury to the skin may aggravate these issues, but it's genetics that brings them on.

SPIDER VEINS are painless clusters of damaged blood vessels near the surface of the

skin that look like squiggles or webs. A dermatologist or a vascular surgeon can nix them with sclerotherapy, which involves injecting an FDA-approved solution into the veins to destroy them gradually, starting in two to three weeks; full results are visible after a few months. "Typically, you need two to three monthly treatments, and the injections don't hurt—it's more of a prickly sensation," says dermatologist Bruce Katz, M.D., founder of the Juva Skin & Laser Center in New York City. Sclerotherapy results are permanent, but if you're prone to spider veins, new ones can pop up.

■ Average cost:

\$750 per treatment

VARICOSE VEINS are large, raised, and sometimes painful; how they're treated depends on their severity and cause. Small varicose veins can often be treated with sclerotherapy, while bulging orropy ones may require a phlebectomy,



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a minimally invasive procedure done with local anesthesia by a dermatologist or a vascular or plastic surgeon. "A few tiny incisions are made in the leg, then a mini crochet-like hook is inserted under the skin to pull out the veins," says Dr. Katz. You might need an ultrasound first to determine the cause of your varicose veins, and in some cases

the doctor may use lasers or radio-frequency devices to shrink the veins before removal. The results of these removal procedures are immediate and permanent, but if you're prone to varicose veins, more may emerge over time.

■ **Average cost:** Treatments start at around \$1,500 per area; they may be covered by health insurance.

TIGHTEN SLACK SKIN

As with the face, the skin on the legs loses collagen because of aging and sun damage, which can make it appear less firm and smooth. Two FDA-approved noninvasive procedures that stimulate new collagen and thicken existing collagen fibers are Virtue RF and Morpheus8. Both require about three to five treatments spaced a few weeks apart, and upkeep treatments are needed every 12 to 18 months to maintain the results. For very loose or folding skin, though, surgery is recommended.

■ **Average cost:** \$1,500 to \$4,000 for a series of treatments

To tackle leg skin at home, many body lotions and creams now contain proven collagen stimulators like peptides and retinol. They may improve the skin's texture somewhat, but "remember that body skin is much thicker than the skin on the face, and we don't know yet whether applying retinoids on the body has the same visible firming impact that it does on facial skin," cautions dermatologist Paul Jarrod Frank, M.D., an assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City. What will make a difference is slathering on a rich lotion with ceramides every day to nourish the skin and keep it plump with moisture, which can help it appear smoother and more luminous.

EDITORS' CHOICES: Olay Firming & Hydrating Body Lotion, \$10, drugstores; Versed Firm Ground Retinol Body Lotion, \$18, versedskin.com



MINIMIZE CELLULITE

There isn't a way to get rid of cellulite, but the nonsurgical options for reducing its appearance have improved in recent years. Keep in mind, though, that FDA-approved cosmetic therapies for cellulite have varying results and it's hard to predict who will get a good outcome and who won't, because the causes of cellulite aren't fully understood.

"Skin that has lost elasticity, irregular fat deposits, and poor lymphatic drainage all play a role," says Dr. Frank. He adds that there's no one-size-fits-all solution, so he takes a multi-targeted approach using injectable fillers to smooth out the grooves of cellulite as well as heat or shock-wave therapy treatments such as Emtone to break up uneven pockets of fat and tighten lax skin.

The newest FDA-approved treatment is called Qwo; it's a series of injections of an enzyme that dissolves the fibrous bands that pull down on skin to cause dimpling, explains Dr. Katz,

who participated in Qwo's clinical trials. While the treatment has been shown to deliver up to an 80% reduction in even severe cellulite, patient reviews are mixed. "Qwo addresses one type of cellulite, but it's not ideal for generalized cellulite," says Dr. Frank.

Before plunking down money for in-office cellulite treatments, consult with more than one cosmetic dermatologist, research verified independent patient reviews of treatments (realself.com is a reputable source), and have realistic expectations of improving, not erasing, your cellulite. As for those at-home toning devices that target cellulite, experts say they may give you a few hours of slightly smoother-looking skin, "but for a temporary tightening and smoothing effect, you're better off treating yourself to a lymphatic drainage massage," says Dr. Frank.

■ **Average cost:** Qwo is \$2,100 to \$3,000 for the full treatment series; procedures with skin-tightening devices like Emtone begin at around \$1,200 for a series of four treatments.

WORK A LITTLE SELF-TANNER MAGIC

We'd argue it should be called *stealth* tanner, because a faux tan on your legs will make veins, cellulite, and uneven tone less visible. For maximum camouflage, try this technique from Sophie Evans, a celebrity spray tanner for St. Tropez self-tanners: Apply a light to medium self-tanner shade all over your legs and body and let it develop

overnight. "The next day, use a dark tinted self-tan lotion or mousse, or the same product you applied the day before, then take a makeup foundation brush or sponge and blend the formula down the sides of your thighs, under your bottom creases, and around your natural curve lines," says Evans. To hide stretch marks or veins, "use a smaller makeup brush or a cotton swab to paint the dark tanner along the marks," she says. For the most flawless self-tan, wait 24 hours after showering and exfoliating before applying the formula—"Cleansing lowers your skin's pH, which can make the self-tan color come out too light," Evans says—and don't skimp on the amount. "Trying to stretch a small pump of self-tanner over a large area of skin is what leads to streaks," she says.

EDITORS' CHOICES: St. Tropez Gradual Tan Classic Daily Firming Lotion, \$29, and Bronzing Mousse, \$42, ulta.com

