

Out of the red

She hated her 'Aunt Sally' cheeks - a legacy of the typical Guernsey lifestyle. But then **Di Digard** discovered that the network of red veins could be banished, thanks to a colour-seeking laser...



Dr John Curran and the magic machine that destroys broken veins.

(Picture by Peter Frankland, 0852824)

IT'S the condition that gave the late comedian W. C. Fields his trademark bulbous nose.

But rosacea, a skin disorder that affects millions, is no joke.

And people who enjoy Guernsey's sunny climate and active lifestyle are prime candidates.

You've probably noticed it on hundreds of faces: the tell-tale network of spider veins that often signals an interest in the great outdoors.

Typically evident in people aged 30 or over, it begins as redness on the cheeks, nose, chin or forehead.

But as time wears on it can become ruddier and more visible, sometimes with lumps and bumps. In severe cases the nose can swell and become bumpy - the W. C. Fields syndrome.

And one of the most common triggers?

Sun exposure. We may not have seen a lot of it this year, but sun has a lot to answer for, according to the Aesthetic Skin Clinic's Dr John Curran.

But for those suffering such unwanted consequences, he has an answer.

He uses intense pulsed light therapy (IPL) to banish surface red veins, both for cosmetic reasons and to help treat medical conditions such as rosacea.

The results, said the man who has recently handed on the presidency of the British Association of Cosmetic Doctors, are 'genuinely fabulous'.

Red veins, he explained, are extremely common. But they are not always caused by rosacea.

'There are a number of other causes including sun and the elements, and some are genetic.

'Steroids can cause them as well as coffee, heat, stings - even social embarrassment. And people of old have associated them with alcohol abuse.'

True enough. But according to Dr Curran, that is a misconception.

Pale Celtic skin is particularly vulnerable to damage, he explained, especially when exposed to harsh elements. 'A lot of the men who worked on the Manchester ship canals developed rosacea, which is where the old wives' tale came from.'

Dr Curran said that there are a number of things that can be done to reduce inflammation caused by rosacea.

Topical and antibiotic treatments are helpful, but as it's an inflammatory condition, using IPL to reduce the redness is very effective. But in many cases, he explained, the veins are quite simply genetic.

Known as telangiectasia, these are small unsightly red, purple or blue blood vessels, most often found along the surface on the face, upper chest and neck.

Those that appear on the legs are often known as spider veins.

And the good news is that because the vessels are not necessary for any essential function, they can be safely removed without any effect on the body.

Sclerotherapy, another way of treating unwanted veins using injections to make them shrink, can leave people with scabs, but the laser is gentler, with no risk of marking the skin with a needle - although the two procedures can be effectively used in combination.

• For more information on the treatment, tel. 736699.

Rosacea

THE skin condition is estimated to affect one in 10 adults. The most common symptom is flushing and redness in the central part of the face, which can sometimes be accompanied by a burning or stinging sensation.

Other types of rosacea can include acne-like pimples in addition to the flushing, visible small blood vessels under the skin, or thickening of the skin on the nose. In severe cases the nose can become significantly enlarged and bulbous and this is known as rhinophyma.

Rosacea of the eyes can cause a number of symptoms, such as watery or bloodshot eyes, conjunctivitis and irritation, or the feeling of a foreign body in the eye. The eyelids may also become red and swollen and styes are common.

Severe cases can result in corneal damage and vision loss, so if you are experiencing any of these symptoms you should consult your doctor immediately.

While its root cause is still unknown, some experts believe that the characteristic flushing and redness can be explained by prolonged dilation of the blood vessels.

Damage to the underlying blood vessels can also make certain areas prone to spots and

pimples.

Certain lifestyle and environmental factors can trigger flare-ups or aggravate individual symptoms of rosacea.

The most common are extremes of temperature (in particular excessive heat), alcoholic drinks, strenuous exercise, stressful situations, sunlight, spicy food and hot drinks. Strong sunlight is also thought to make symptoms worse.

Treatment varies depending on the type of rosacea. For the acne-like variety, GPs often prescribe antibiotic gels or azelaic acid 15% gel, a non-antibiotic formula.

For flushing rosacea, antibiotics are not always effective in reducing redness and swelling. The most effective way to prevent these symptoms is by identifying and avoiding known triggers.

Lasers and pulsed light therapies are also effective.

The initial stages of skin thickening rosacea may respond to oral antibiotic treatment, but advanced rhinophyma requires surgery to remove the excess tissue.

For rosacea of the eyes, antibiotics can effectively control most of the symptoms. Eye drops may help to improve dry eyes and itching.

Red veins: what's to blame?

MORE often than not, it's lifestyle. And failure to protect the skin is the prime cause, said Dr Curran. 'People forget, when walking the dog in the sun or gardening, that for skin that's the same as sunbathing. We know that UVA and UVB damage the skin, so when they are going outside people need to use sun blocks. Titanium or zinc dioxide are the things to look for on labels, to create physical blocks.' But plastering on a layer at the beginning of a day and then forgetting it isn't enough. 'Frequency of application is also sacred,' warned Dr Curran, 'especially if you're out on a boat, for example. With sea spray, that's going to be off in 25 minutes.'

And it's not just red veins we should worry about.

'When we look at people with wrinkles, they are not necessarily caused by age.



Dr Curran uses intense pulsed light therapy to banish surface red veins, both for cosmetic reasons and to help treat medical conditions such as rosacea. (0852825)

'Ninety-five per cent of that is caused by UV light, which hits the skin and affects the cells' nucleus.' That causes abnormal

reproduction of the cells and as a result they are not as efficient at producing collagen and elastin – the magic ingredients that keep skin young-looking.

Before...

...and after

These pictures show some of the dramatic results achievable using IPL.

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Goodbye Sally

FOR years I'd sported a fine network of tiny red veins on my cheeks – a permanent Aunt Sally look that intensified when exposed to the elements, heat or when stress caught up with me. Add a couple of glasses of soothing wine and Sal was in full flight. Not a great look. IPL would sort it out in no time, said Dr Curran. And the results would be 'awesome'. First, investigation with polarised light revealed the extent of the problem. Then came a patch test followed by a topical anaesthetic. A lot of people are frightened of lasers because they think in terms of ablative procedures – a skin peel, for example – where skin is left red-raw," he said. "These lasers don't break the surface of the skin in any way. They work by producing a narrow beam of light that will seek to match the colour of the vein. So the laser is looking for red.

"When it hits it, there's a massive release of energy, called selective photo thermolysis, which destroys the vein." For this reason, areas being treated should be untanned – even the fake variety is out, because any form of tanning confuses the laser. The sensation is uncomfortable rather than painful: a hot, stinging sensation that is over in seconds. Treatment in my case lasted between 15 and 20 minutes each session, with no downtime. Cooling aloe vera gel and face pads are applied immediately afterwards, and any slight redness is easily covered. Half an hour after the treatments I was back at work with no one any the wiser. "There is a risk of a little bit of skin damage, but that's rare," explained Dr Curran. "Bruising is at the worst end of side effects, but most people get away without it."

Around two days after each session I experienced slight facial swelling, which lasted two-to-three days – the 'chipmunk effect' as my family dubbed it. But it was a small price to pay for the results. And there are added benefits: the treatment boosts collagen, tightens pores and photo-rejuvenates the skin. Small varicose veins can also be laser treated, using a different wavelength which passes through the skin without damaging it. But the clinic deals most often with simple, red facial veins – the Guernsey legacy. In my case, the results were as successful as promised. Six months later, one or two veins crept back despite daily use of the recommended factor 40 sun block. But that was easily remedied with a follow-up treatment. Aunt Sally? She's been shown the door.