

## CAPILLARITIS



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Capillaritis is the name given to a harmless skin condition in which there are reddish-brown patches caused by leaky capillaries in the skin. It is also known as pigmented purpura.

The capillaries are small blood vessels near to the skin surface. For unknown reasons they sometimes become inflamed and allow blood cells to pass through small gaps that arise in the capillary walls. The result is tiny red dots, described as cayenne pepper spots that appear on the skin. They group together to form a flat red patch, which becomes brown and then slowly fades over weeks to months.

### What is the cause of capillaritis?

The cause of capillaritis is usually unknown. Commonly, it appears after walking, or exercise or activities that increase the fluid pressure in the small capillaries in the skin. This condition can appear even if the deeper circulation is normal. Occasionally it arises as a reaction to a medication; many different drugs have been occasionally associated with capillaritis.

### Clinical features

There are several descriptive types of capillaritis. They are often named after the dermatologist who first described them.

**Schamberg's disease** (progressive pigmented purpura). This is the most common type of capillaritis. Crops of red-brown flat patches with cayenne pepper spots on their borders appear for no apparent reason. Although most common on the lower legs, it can arise on any part of the body. It is usually irregularly distributed on both sides with few or many patches. There are no symptoms.

**Gougerot-Blum** (pigmented purpuric lichenoid dermatosis) This form of capillaritis is less common. The patches are thickened and itchy, rather like eczema.

**Majocchi's purpura** (purpura annularis telangiectoides). In this condition, there are dilated capillaries as well as brown patches and cayenne spots. The patches gradually spread outwards.

**Lichen aureus.** Lichen aureus is a solitary brown-yellow patch that is very persistent. It often overlies a varicose vein.

**Exercise-induced capillaritis** Crops of small red spots may develop on the ankles following prolonged or vigorous exercise (e.g. 18 holes of golf, walking or dancing), especially during warm weather. The spots fade to brown within a few days and eventually disappear. A burning sensation may occur as the new lesions appear.

### Treatment

There is no known cure for most cases of capillaritis. It can disappear within a few weeks, recur from time to time, or frequently persist for years. Topical steroids can be helpful for itching but rarely clear the capillaritis. If the lower leg is affected, consider wearing graduated compression hose. Currently, available lasers are not particularly helpful for this condition.