

Compression stockings apply constant pressure to your leg to improve the circulation through your veins and can help prevent the ulcer returning.

It is important that you put your stockings on first thing in the morning and remove them before going to bed at night. Applicators to help you apply the stocking are available on prescription. You should talk to your GP or community nurse for advice on applicators.



Above: Example of Compression Stocking

There are a number of other things you can do to stop your leg ulcers from coming back again:

- keep your legs raised at night
- exercise regularly, for example, take a 30 minute walk each day
- avoid bumps to the legs which could cause the ulcer to come back, eg. bumps from supermarket trolleys
- keep your feet warm but avoid hot temperatures such as sitting too close to the fire or having the bath water too hot
- take care when washing your legs use a non-perfumed moisturiser regularly on your legs
- examine your legs regularly for broken skin and swelling.

## When should I seek help?

You must tell your healthcare professional if you have any of the following problems:

- broken skin, irritation or redness
- swelling of the leg
- pain becoming worse
- compression stocking becoming worn or torn or not fitting comfortably.

## Further help and information

For more details please contact your Practice Nurse or Health Adviser.

## We are listening - how did we do?

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- speak to a member of staff
- visit our website feedback section at: [www.wihb.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.wihb.scot.nhs.uk) or share your story at: [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk) or tel. 0800 122 31 35
- tel. 01851 708069 Monday-Friday between 9am-5.30pm.

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# Venous Leg Ulcers



Useful information for patients and their  
carers about Venous Leg Ulcers

## Introduction

A leg ulcer is an area of damaged skin where the tissue underneath is exposed. Leg ulcers develop when there is poor blood circulation in the veins of your legs.

In healthy leg veins, blood pressure is kept at the right level by the valves in your veins. These valves prevent blood from flowing backwards and keep blood moving through your veins.

When the valves become damaged, the blood pressure in the veins of your legs will rise. This causes fluid to leak out of them leading to swelling, irritation, tenderness and eventually the formation of an ulcer.

## Treatment for leg ulcers

Compression bandaging is the most effective treatment for venous leg ulcers. The bandages work by helping push the blood in your leg veins back up to your heart.

The type of bandage you wear will be decided by your healthcare professional following discussion with you. Different strengths are available and your healthcare professional will help select the best one for you – aiming to find the strongest that you are able to wear.

A dressing is worn under the bandage and will be changed when required, usually once a week, by your healthcare professional.

When the dressing is changed, you should take the opportunity to gently wash your leg in warm tap water.

Waterproof protectors are available for bathing/showering at home between dressing changes. Ask your healthcare professional for further details.

## Elevation (raising your legs)

When resting, you should try to keep your ankles up higher than your heart. This allows the fluid to drain from your legs.

At night time it is important that you keep to your normal sleeping habits – you should sleep in your bed rather than in a chair.

Raising the foot of your bed at night may also help.

## Exercise

You should keep mobile and continue with your everyday activities. Taking a walk each day can help.

You should avoid standing still but if you have to stand you could exercise on the spot by moving your toes inside your shoes.

You can also do some exercises when you are sitting, for example you can rotate your ankles and bend your toes towards you then away from you.

## Moisturising

Dry scaly skin needs to be treated with a non-perfumed moisturiser (emollient) to keep the skin moist. If you have been prescribed a moisturiser, you should use it as often as possible, ideally once or twice a day. You should also avoid perfumed soaps and dry your legs carefully to prevent irritation.

Skin irritation (dermatitis) near a leg ulcer is usually caused by the leaky veins, but may sometimes be due to treatments such as creams, dressings and bandages. You may need to be referred to a dermatologist (skin-care specialist) who may investigate this by doing skin patch tests.

## Are leg ulcers painful?

You may or may not experience pain from your leg ulcer.

If you do have pain and it prevents you from carrying out your normal daily activities, you should speak to your GP, community nurse or healthcare professional about this.

## Caring for your legs once your leg ulcer has healed

Venous leg ulcers result from a chronic condition of the veins and even when they have been treated successfully are likely to return.

You can help to prevent this by wearing compression stockings.