Managing your Venous Leg Ulcer

Information for patients, relatives and carers

For more information, please contact us using the Telephone numbers on page 10

Dermatology Department

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Caring with pride
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Leg ulcers are a common problem. They affect a quarter of a million of people in Great Britain.

There are different types of leg ulcers. Yours is a:

**Venous leg ulcer**

**What causes a venous ulcer?**

A venous ulcer is caused by damage to the veins in your legs. This affects the blood supply in your legs.

Veins take the blood back to your heart. In your legs the blood flows upward towards your heart. Every time the calf muscles in your leg move, they squeeze and pump the blood upwards. To prevent the blood flowing backwards, there are one-way valves in your veins.
Over the years your veins and valves have been damaged. They are no longer able to do their job correctly.

What caused them to become damaged?

There are a number of possibilities:

- Previous thrombosis (clot) in the leg veins
- Being overweight
- Standing still for long periods of time
- Pregnancy
- Smoking
How can I get help?

Wearing compression bandages whilst your ulcer is healing will help your recovery. However, it is also important that when your ulcer is healed you understand that wearing support stockings long term will help prevent the ulcer recurring. This will be explained and discussed with you by the nurse and doctor.

Why bandages or stockings?

They give your legs the necessary support. This helps your veins and valves to function better, and helps to return the blood back to your heart. Bandages or stockings also help reduce swelling in your legs.

How long will it take to heal?

We wish we could give you a healing time, but we cannot, as everyone is different. Certain factors have to be considered:

- How long have you had the ulcer?
- How big or deep is the ulcer?
- Is there evidence of other medical problems?
- Is there infection in the ulcer?
- Your life style.

If you have any questions, please ask the nurse or doctor.
What can I do to help?

In this leaflet we give you some advice on do’s and don’ts.

Prevention of another ulcer is easier than the cure.

Please follow this advice as much as you can to assist your ulcer to heal.

**Do** wear your bandages as advised until your ulcer is healed

When healed, carry on with the advice. Remember to wear your support stockings.

Once healed: **do** wear your support stockings

**Do** put them on before you get out of bed on a morning

**Do** regular exercise, if you are able

We also suggest exercising your leg muscles as recommended by the doctor. However, if you are unable, please do not attempt this.
Suggested exercises for leg muscles

Consider doing them whilst watching TV

Slowly point foot towards floor. Then bring it back as far as it will go. **Repeat 10 times.**

Slowly make circular movements. First clockwise, then anti-clockwise. **Repeat 10 times.**

**DO** remember if you need to stop and rest, do so.

Exercise by walking or as shown above only helps if you have your compression bandages or support stockings on. (These foot exercises should only be carried out if you are active and mobile).
Do try and lose weight if you are overweight, as being overweight puts strain on your veins in your legs.

Do try and have daily fresh fruit containing vitamin C. Best sources are oranges, pure orange juice or blackcurrant drink e.g. Ribena.

Do inform us if you experience any pain or discomfort with your compression bandage or stockings. Remove them if the pain is really extreme or your toes turn blue or numb.

Do rest with your feet up; if advised by your doctor raise your leg so it is above the level of your heart. This helps the blood flow in your legs, improves healing and reduces any swelling.

Do have a bath or shower. The nurse will discuss this with you.
Important points

Don’t stand or sit for long periods of time without moving your legs

Don’t allow your legs to press against the edge of a chair whilst you are sitting. This may affect the blood flow to your legs and potentially cause damage to your legs

Don’t wear tight sock garters, socks or girdles as this may restrict your blood flow to your legs

Don’t cross your legs as it restricts the blood flow in the legs

Don’t warm your legs directly in front of the fire

Don’t smoke; stopping can benefit your circulation
Contact details

York Clinic:
01904 726629
Monday to Friday 8am – 5.30pm

Scarborough Clinic:
01723 342492 or 368222 ext. 2217
Monday to Friday

Selby Clinic:
01757 724296
Monday & Friday 8am – 4pm
Wednesday 8am – 1pm
Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact: Lynda Greetham, Sister, Dermatology Department, The York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or telephone 01904 726629.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.
Please telephone or email if you require this information in a different language or format

01904 725566
email: access@york.nhs.uk

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