



Venous leg ulcers

Patient information

What is a venous leg ulcer?

A venous leg ulcer is a wound on the lower leg that has difficulty healing due to impaired venous function in the leg.

This means that the veins in the leg are not able to return the blood back up to the heart. This is known as venous insufficiency.

This results in swelling and then the skin becoming fragile and prone to breaking down. Other signs that the veins aren't working efficiently are brown skin staining, dermatitis and dry skin.

What is the treatment?

Most venous leg ulcers can be treated using compression bandages. This stops the fluid pooling in the legs by applying a light squeeze up the leg.

These bandages can be reapplied as often as every day or as little as twice a week. Most ulcers will take 4-12 weeks to heal after compression bandaging is commenced.

Once the venous leg ulcer has healed you should start wearing compression stockings. These will be supplied by the hospital. The stockings prevent fluid build-up and therefore prevent further ulcers developing.

Can I have surgery?

Usually the surgeon will order an ultrasound of your veins. Depending on which veins are damaged the surgeon may recommend surgery. This surgery will be done once the ulcer heals.

There are different types of surgery available and the surgeon will choose the best type for you. They are:

- open surgery to remove the veins
- radiofrequency ablation which close the vein completely
- injection sclerotherapy to block off the veins.

Once the veins are removed or blocked they no longer affect the system and the chance of developing another ulcer reduces. However, stockings may be a long-term treatment.

Stockings and vein treatments provide the best chance of reducing ulcer recurrence.

Things you should do:

- ✓ Walk as much as you can to improve circulation.
- ✓ Put your feet up when resting to prevent fluid pooling in your legs.
- ✓ Exercise your ankles by rotating them and pointing and flexing your feet.
- ✓ Moisturise your legs to prevent dry skin building up – this is frequently where ulcers start.

Things you should not do:

- X Avoid sitting for long periods – walking is the best way to improve circulation. If you need to sit ensure your feet are elevated.
- X Avoid gaining weight as this has a negative effect on your circulation.
- X Don't wear tight shoes or clothing as this can constrict blood supply.
- X Don't interfere with the dressing or bandage as this can decrease the effectiveness or the compression and delay healing.

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This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

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