

## What should I do next?

If you have any concerns about the condition of your legs, even if you don't have exactly the same symptoms as described in this leaflet, it may be appropriate for your legs to be professionally assessed. In the first instance you should speak to your doctor, nurse or local Leg Club®, *who may* give you a more thorough examination. This may include a full health check and a review of the circulation in your lower legs.

## What is a Leg Club®?

Leg Club®s are a research based initiative which provide community-based treatment, health promotion, education and ongoing care for people of all age groups who are experiencing leg-related problems.

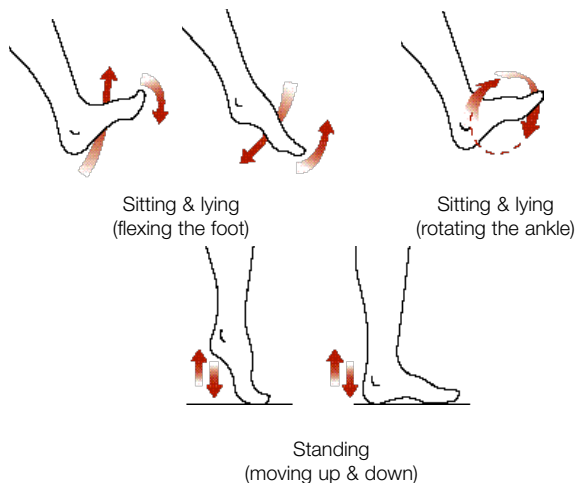
The Leg Club® nursing team are employed by local Primary Care Trusts or Primary Care Organisations and the nurses incorporate the Leg Club®s into their everyday working practice.

No appointment is required and the Leg Club® opening hours should be available from the local surgery, community nurses' office, adverts in the local Parish magazine and village shops, or from the Leg Club® website.

Through education and ongoing advice and support from your Leg Club® nurses', you will be aware that care and the prevention of recurrence of leg-related problems is for life!

## What you can do for yourself

Here are some useful exercises to help improve your circulation.



## Did you know?

Modern compression hosiery uses lightweight, comfortable yarns virtually indistinguishable from regular hosiery. In fact, the woman on the left of the front cover photo is wearing compression tights.



Visit your nearest Leg Club®



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# Healthy legs for life!

Prevention is better than cure.

This leaflet has been produced to help make you aware of some of the common leg complaints which, if diagnosed early enough, can be helped or eliminated by the use of compression therapy.

It has been estimated that around 50% of the western population are likely to get some form of venous disease during their lifetime. This can range from spider veins to more serious complaints such as leg ulcers. This is due to the fact that we have evolved to walk upright which means that gravity is constantly forcing blood away from the heart and back into your legs.

If normal bloodflow through the valves within the deep veins in your legs becomes ineffective through injury or inactivity, the blood may be redirected to the superficial veins. These are situated near the surface of the skin, causing various complaints such as varicose veins and leg ulcers. It is this extra pressure in your veins that may lead to problems in later life.

If you are having problems with your legs, you may have noticed that the skin has become discoloured and you may also experience itchiness in the lower part.

The veins may also start to bulge and become sore. The pain may be worse at the end of the day when you have been standing for long periods.

These problems are usually more common where there is a family history of varicose veins or leg ulcers.

**Motorcycle riders may be prone to venous disease, mainly due to the riding position (shown below) which can put pressure on the major arteries, restricting blood flow to the lower limbs.**



The gold standard for the treatment of venous disease is compression therapy. Compression socks/stockings are ideally suited for long term treatment of disorders of the venous system.

## How compression therapy works

Compression hosiery and bandages work by applying a firm, continuous, graduated pressure to the muscles and veins in your legs. When your calf muscle contracts e.g. during walking, your hosiery for example will 'give' and then return to its original position. By doing this, your hosiery is able to assist your body's own natural mechanism for returning the blood back to your heart.

The compression sock/stocking applies the correct amount of pressure at particular points of the leg. The most pressure is placed around the ankle, then decreases gradually towards the thigh.

## What is venous insufficiency?

Do your legs feel tired, heavy and the ankles swollen at the end of the day, or are your legs itching? This could be the first sign of venous disease, even before you see anything on your skin.

A family history of venous problems such as varicose veins or being pregnant can add to this and as a result the valves in your veins do not work as efficiently as they should.



Flared ankles

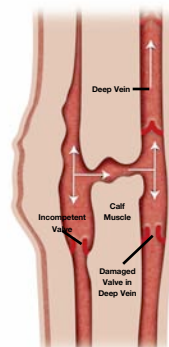


Varicose veins



Spider veins

If your veins get out of shape and your legs feel tired, whether through lack of exercise, long periods of standing or sitting or hereditary disease, this can lead to a reduced function of the calf pump muscle, i.e. the blood flow back to the heart is impaired. The consequence: pressure on the walls in the veins rises, and in turn, the veins expand. A further complication can be a deep vein thrombosis, better known as DVT.



Untreated venous insufficiency can lead to the development of venous leg ulcers. This can be avoided in the majority of cases with simply intervention.

## For your health and well-being!

- Do you have swollen ankles and/or have heavy legs at the end of the day?**
- Are you pregnant?**
- Are you overweight?**
- Does your work involve sitting or standing for long periods?**
- Does your family have a history of venous problems?**
- Do you fly or drive for more than 2 hours regularly?**
- Do you have unsightly spider or varicose veins?**

If you have ticked one or more of the of the above questions, then we advise you to get in touch with a Leg Club® near you and get some advice on how to look after your legs and prevent any venous problems in the future.

## How to examine your own legs

If your veins are not working efficiently you may then experience skin changes and other signs that indicate what is happening under the surface of your skin.

Ticking the boxes below may show that you have problems with the veins in your lower legs. They may not be working as efficiently as they did.

Do you regularly have any of the following symptoms?:

- reddish/brown staining above the ankle*
- sores that appear within the stained skin*
- itchy patches above the ankle*
- wounds or knocks that are slow to heal*
- visible and painful varicose veins*
- tired, throbbing and/or swollen legs*

With all this going on, the skin above the ankle will be very vulnerable. If the above symptoms are not attended to then the risk of developing leg ulcers is high. The provision of compression hosiery or socks will reduce the risk of the above by helping the blood return up the leg.