

# What is a Leg Club<sup>®</sup>?



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Leg Clubs are a research-based initiative which provide treatment, health promotion, education and ongoing care for people of all age groups who are experiencing leg-related problems, within a social model of care in the community. Leg Club staff work in a unique partnership with patients (who once they join become members) and the local community. Working to best-practice guidelines they provide a high standard of care in a social and friendly setting that promotes empathy, peer support and informed choice.

Leg Clubs typically meet once a week, but in some areas the Club is held twice-weekly. No appointments are required and members can drop in to chat over a cup of tea or coffee while awaiting treatment. Transport can be arranged to and from the Clubs, and parking is available.

The emphasis of the Leg Club is to empower members to participate in their care in a social environment that eases loneliness by providing congenial surroundings where old friends can meet and new friendships are formed.

Leg Clubs have **four** key features that are different from conventional leg ulcer clinics:

- 1 A non-medical setting – e.g. community/church/village hall. This avoids the stigma or fear of attending a medical setting and reinforces the community ownership of the Club
- 2 Informal, open access, no appointment required. This encourages opportunistic attendance for information and advice, providing greatly increased opportunities for early diagnosis and leg ulcer prevention and helps isolated older people reintegrate into their community
- 3 Collective treatment. People share their experience, gaining peer support, and encouraging them to take ownership of their treatment
- 4 Integrated 'well leg' regime, supporting maintenance of healthy legs, positive health beliefs and broad health promotion.

"I pick up an elderly lady who hasn't got any transport. Both she and her family have become friends, so you can see how this works all together."

*Leg Club Member*

## What type of problems can be treated?

Any problems involving legs can be treated, from varicose veins, skin tears, eczema, leg ulcers to difficulties in walking.

For many people suffering with swollen legs and/or leg ulcers the main problems are associated with pain, infection, wound leakage, immobility, loneliness and isolation, and Leg Clubs are there to deal with them all. Members (those in the community who suffer from leg ulceration, and their friends and families) can rely on a venue where their needs will be met within a social model of care. They have access to treatment, equipment, medical education, leg health, general health and nutritional advice, social interaction and refreshments. Leg Clubs are one of the few healthcare initiatives that encompass all of the UK government's strategic initiatives in one care model.

"I just think that it is a very good thing, because a lot of people just shut themselves away and just think that nothing can be done."

*Leg Club Member*

## What is the cost?

The Leg Club nursing teams are employed by NHS local provider services, CCGs and GP consortia and the nurses incorporate the Leg Clubs into their everyday practice. The treatment is free and refreshments are freely available, for which donations are welcomed. Due to the cost of hiring the venue it is hoped that members will support this by fundraising activities and holding weekly raffles at their Club.

## What happens at a Leg Club and who will be there?

There is no appointment required and the Leg Club opening hours should be made available from the local surgery, community nurses' office, website ([www.legclub.org](http://www.legclub.org)) and adverts in the local Parish magazine and village shops.

You can just drop into your local Leg Club at any time during opening hours, and you will be made to feel extremely welcome by the volunteer receptionist and members. Administration and refreshments are provided by a committee of volunteers, and transport may be available through Dial-a-Ride and volunteers, etc., depending on the arrangements made between the Leg Club team and community.

## Meet, greet and supportive care

The receptionist is a volunteer and may well have experienced life with a leg-related problem and he/ she will be very sympathetic to how you may be feeling, whether you have a leg ulcer or any other problem with your legs.

The receptionist will take details of why you are attending, and you will be given a number so you know when you are going to be seen.

The waiting environment is welcoming and you will be introduced to other members by the receptionist or another volunteer, and the volunteer responsible for refreshments will ensure that you enjoy a cup of tea or coffee.

The layout of the Leg Club is one of a social club where members participate as they wish, with many members remaining to have refreshments throughout the session and to participate with other Club or health-related activities.

Another important part of the Clubs' activities is the pastoral care of its members and volunteers. The nature of this care varies, from the simple provision of tea, coffee and biscuits at each session, to sending flowers to mark important events or bereavements, to hospital visiting when that is appropriate. It is a significant part of each Leg Club committee's role to listen to the needs and comments of the members and, where possible, to meet them.

## Clinical area

Treatment is undertaken collectively in a separate area where 2 or 3 people can have their legs washed and dressed in the same space. This gives them the opportunity to compare healing and treatments. Members are openly encouraged to discuss treatment issues with the nursing team and other Club members. Each Leg Club provides private facilities for those who wish to have treatment in privacy.

Members experiencing a similar condition talk openly about their experience and this has been found to be most beneficial and reassuring that they are not alone, as others are experiencing the same or similar conditions.

A small social survey was designed by the Chairman and committee of two Leg Clubs to obtain members' views of their two local Leg Clubs. The survey was conducted by the Leg Club committee members. The survey results indicated that a non-threatening environment was an important factor.

The members commented on their reluctance to visit a medical centre for general lower limb advice or treatment, but found that attending a clinic in a social setting gave them a sense of purpose, that they shared a common problem, and were not in isolation. The data further identified that they formed friendships, gained an understanding of others' problems and needs, and their medically related problems became secondary. Through this network of mutual support and friendship, concordance to treatment resulted from a strong sense of motivation. This was expressed through their trust, confidence, and understanding.

## **Skilled nurses – holistic assessment**

The receptionist and staff explain the nature of collective treatment to new members and ensure that provision is available for individual treatment should it be requested.

The nursing team are employed by their organisation to run the Leg Club and wound care products are purchased in the same way as a conventional medical GP clinic. Pre – and post-registration students seconded to Leg Clubs will gain valuable wound care experience and gain understanding of the importance of addressing social isolation. The nursing team performs an assessment and prescribes accordingly. The Leg Clubs also work closely with local GP surgeries and other clinical facilities, with an aim to provide a seamless service and refer appropriately.

All members are seen holistically and their social and psychological needs addressed. Care is delivered in a relaxed, informal atmosphere in which comradeship, empathy and peer support are very evident. This approach is both popular with the members and successful in improving all aspects of a member's wellbeing. In physical terms, legs have been healed, mobility greatly restored, pain reduced. In social terms, company has been provided, an awareness of others' problems has been established, and opportunities for service in the community gladly taken. In psychological terms, fears have been reduced, anxieties relieved and enjoyment of life restored.

The 'well leg' programme at the Leg Club is aimed at health education, advice, prevention and maintenance of further leg-related problems once an ulcer has healed. Members that have healed and wish to remain healed attend on a regular three-monthly basis for a full reassessment, support and advice.

Through education and ongoing advice and support members are aware that care and the prevention of reoccurrence of leg-related problems is for life. And prevention is better than cure.

## Working in partnership

Apart from the direct costs of care delivery, Leg Clubs are self-funded (running costs and equipment costs) through money raised by volunteers within the community. In setting up Leg Clubs, nurses truly 'get to know' the communities they serve, working alongside the community and members to provide an environment of genuine patient empowerment.

The community volunteers' and members' enthusiasm and boundless energy has resulted in the creation of friendship clubs and peer groups where support and advice is offered to volunteers involved in newly formed Leg Clubs. The role of the volunteer receptionist has evolved to include newsletters, questionnaires, general information, fund-raising letters and information leaflets, organisation of fund-raising events, maintenance of patient register and documentation.

"You are with other people who are in the same situation. It does help to be able to compare what you are feeling with others."

*Leg Club Member*

"Well, if you are left on your own in any discomfort you tend to wallow a bit in self pity which is not a good thing under any circumstances."

*Leg Club Member*

