

The social and physical benefits of the Lindsay Leg Clubs



Healing leg ulcers is not about looking at the wound and deciding on a dressing. It is more about addressing the underlying pathology while reducing stressors that may delay healing.

Over the past decade it has become clear that stress can significantly slow wound healing, and even mild stress can impair healing (Christian et al, 2006) and loneliness or lack of exercise can increase levels of stress. The Lindsay Leg Club Foundation strives to not only address loneliness, but to increase physical potential for each Club Member, while at the same time addressing the underlying causes of leg ulceration in order to achieve the good healing rates that is seen in the Leg Clubs throughout the UK and Australia.

When treating leg ulcers, it is all too easy to lose sight of the underlying pathology and focus upon the visible ulcer—this will always be a mistake. The ulcer is merely a symptom of an underlying problem, and the problem should be addressed before thinking about which dressing to use.

The problem can be as simple as leading a sedentary lifestyle when the muscle ‘pumps’ and intrathoracic pressure are not activated by exercise. Or it may be more serious and due to poor arterial blood supply to the lower limb.

Psychosocial deprivation has been found to impair wound healing (Detillion et al, 2004) and addressing the social isolation, while advising on health behaviours, including diet, sleep, exercise, smoking, and alcohol use, all comprise a key pathway from stress to wound healing.

Knighton and Presteigne Leg Club have undertaken a ‘Lift Programme’ in order to address some of the problems of limited mobility and social isolation. Whereas Bradford on Avon have a ‘Walking Group’ who have a volunteer that will regularly take groups of Club Members for short walks.

The Lift Programme (or any exercise) aims to promote independence by engaging fine motor movements. Exercise is also an enjoyable experience (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Exercise to music

Resistance bands (Figure 2) are used to strengthen muscles and chairs are used for support when undertaking balance exercises.

One Leg Club has been providing exercise classes for some



Figure 2. Club Members using resistance bands to strengthen muscles

Sylvie Hampton

Independent Wound Care Consultant Nurse

Sylvie.hampton@legclubfoundation.com



Figure 3. An example of games and interaction at a Leg Club, designed to stimulate the mind and provide social interaction

time and it has freed up one lady who can now knit, something she was unable to do for some time.

Volunteers, who are the backbone of any Leg Club, are taught to undertake the exercise sessions to music. This is a social and enjoyable way of maintaining independence. Also, Club Members will always benefit from learning armchair exercise that they can undertake at home.

The psychosocial element of Leg Clubs

Evidence from different research paradigms suggests that psychological stress and other behavioural factors can affect wound healing, and even a single 30-minute marital conflict discussion in a laboratory setting can slow wound healing (Christian et al, 2006). Games and interaction (*Figure 3*) are used to stimulate the mind and to provide the social interaction that is so beneficial to healing.

Never knowing when the nurse is going to call in order to change a dressing or having to wait in a doctor's surgery with wounds that may be malodorous or painful, and loneliness are some of the issues that can cause stress and delay wound healing. The psychosocial element of Leg Clubs is supported by learning to knit or having access to partners in playing games, or someone to interact with that obviously cares about

your wellbeing (*Figure 3*). These will all reduce levels of stress and lead to better wound healing potential.

Some Leg Clubs will organise talks for the Club Members, such as the fire service, who will inform the Club Members on how to protect against fire, or other agencies that can help increase enjoyment and knowledge of the group.

Conclusions

The true impact of stress on wound healing can be difficult to calculate. However, the healing rates seen in Leg Clubs throughout UK and Australia are excellent and cannot be explained away by nurses changing dressings because these are often the same nurses that provide care prior to the Club Member attending the Leg Club. Although changing the dressing is important, it does not explain the stories told by the Leg Club Members of how they had wounds for many years that suddenly began to heal when attending Leg Clubs. Addressing the psychosocial element of wound healing is an extremely important part of healing wounds. **CWC**

Christian LM, Graham JE, Padgett DA, et al. Stress and Wound Healing. *Neuroimmunomodulation*. 2006;13:337–46

Detillion CE, Craft TK, Glasper ER, et al. Social facilitation of wound healing. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*. 2004;29(8):1004–11