How compression therapy works

Compression therapy is the word given to hosiery and bandages that aid/assist the blood in your leg veins being pushed back up to your heart. Wearing them can stop legs feeling tired and heavy, varicose veins will no longer bulge and any sores on your leg will have a healthy blood supply to help them heal.

Compression hosiery should always be prescribed by a nurse or doctor to make sure it is safe for you to wear.

Compression assists blood flow towards your heart

Low compression at your thigh

Intermediate compression at your calf

Higher compression at your ankle

What should I do if I'm advised to wear compression hosiery?

If you are advised to wear compression hosiery, it is important that you wear the hosiery – ideally, every day.

Modern compression hosiery uses lightweight, comfortable yarns, virtually impossible to tell apart from regular hosiery.

If your hosiery is not comfortable or is difficult to put on, please speak to your doctor or nurse. It is important that you get the correct fit and that you know how to put them on easily.

Compression hosiery will help the blood return up the leg, thereby

- reducing the likelihood of developing a leg ulcer
- reducing the swelling and aching in the leg
- reducing irritation and discoloration of the skin

What should I do next?

Even if you don't have exactly the symptoms described in this leaflet, if you have any concerns about the condition of your legs or feet you should have them professionally assessed. In the first instance, speak to your doctor, nurse, podiatrist, pharmacist or local Leg Club, who will give you a thorough examination. This may include a full health check and review of the circulation in your legs.

Contact **01473 749565**
Email: **lynn.bullock@legclubfoundation.com**

What is a Leg Club?

Leg Clubs 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 teams are employed by NHS local provider services, CCGs and GP consortia and the nurses incorporate the Leg Clubs into their everyday practice.

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

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

Visit your nearest Leg Club

The Lindsay Leg Club Foundation
Ipswich, PO Box 689, IP1 9BN

Telephone
01473 749565

Email:
lynn.bullock@legclubfoundation.com

www.legclub.org

Useful leg exercises to help improve your circulation

Sitting & lying (flexing the foot)

Sitting & lying (rotating the ankle)

Standing (moving up and down)

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LEG CLUB®
www.legclub.org

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The Leg Club Foundation is proud to be a member of the Legs Matters coalition **www.legsmatter.org**

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Taking Care of your Legs

Your Self Help Guide

- **How to examine your legs**
- **The most common leg problems**
- **Do's & don'ts**
- **How compression therapy works**

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How to examine your legs

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

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

If you do have any of these symptoms, this may be due to the veins in your lower legs not working effectively.

Having problems with your veins increases the risk of developing a leg ulcer. Therefore, wearing compression hosiery will reduce the risk of this happening by helping the blood to return up the leg.

Do's and don'ts

Do...

- regularly moisturise your legs
- walk and exercise regularly
- eat a balanced diet and watch your weight
- put your feet up
- check your legs and feet regularly
- get treatment early for any knocks or sores on your lower leg or feet, particularly if you suffer from diabetes
- act on advice from a trained healthcare professional

Don't...

- cross your legs for long periods
- stand still for long periods
- have very hot baths
- ignore any sores or irritations
- assume that your leg will just get better by itself
- smoke
- remain inactive for extended periods, eg long journeys

The most common leg problems

Varicose veins

A varicose vein occurs when the valves within the veins do not work and allow blood to flow the wrong way. Eventually the vein becomes permanently enlarged and unsightly – and will be painful.

Varicose veins are usually thought to be a hereditary condition in approximately 75% of cases.

If your veins are weak, any additional strain or pressure put on them during everyday life may result in the formation of varicose veins.

There are six common things that can have an effect on your chances of developing varicose veins and these are:

- pregnancy
- occupational
- obesity
- constriction
- injury
- constipation

General skin changes

Your skin naturally changes as you get older. your skin may lose its softness, elasticity and smoothness after a while. However, you may notice more unusual changes such as your legs becoming dry, flaky and discoloured brown staining over time. This may be a result of some of the fluid within the veins leaking into the surrounding tissues.

Swollen ankles and legs

Swelling occurs when there is an increase in fluid in your legs. This swelling is called oedema which can be a painful, upsetting condition. This can occur for a number of reasons, some of which may be more serious than others.

- Constriction from clothing
- Lack of movement during a long journey
- Eczema/contact dermatitis
- Heart conditions
- Medication
- Leg ulcers
- Low blood protein level
- Failure/overload of lymphatics
- Varicose veins/poor circulation
- Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

Chronic oedema is the name given to swelling in the leg which is present for over 3 months.

It may cause skin changes such as tissue thickening, and increased risk of infection (cellulitis). There are various causes of long term swelling such as immobility, or problems with your veins or lymphatic system (which helps drain fluid from tissue).

Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

DVT is a condition in which a small blood clot forms mainly in the deep veins of the legs as a result of sluggish bloodflow.

Recently there has been a lot of coverage in newspapers of people developing DVT during travel and one of the ways of helping to reduce the risk is by the wearing medical compression hosiery, which is available through your local chemist/pharmacy.

Venous leg ulcers

A venous leg ulcer is a sore or wound on your skin normally below your knee or on your foot, that fails to heal even after several weeks. Compression hosiery and bandages give support to your veins to encourage the blood to flow back up the legs to the heart, therefore helping the leg to heal and preventing the sore reoccurring.

Arterial ulcers

Fatty layers can collect in your arteries causing them to get narrower, meaning less blood flow to your lower legs. This can cause your legs to feel cold and painful, especially when your legs are elevated. When the blood flow is reduced ulcers can occur.

Diabetes

Foot problems are one of the most common reasons for someone with diabetes being admitted to hospital. People who have diabetes should take special care with their legs and feet and should not wear compression products without taking advice from their GP or practice nurse. In addition, it is recommended that you should also visit a podiatrist on a regular basis.

Lymphoedema

Oedema means the build up of an excess amount of fluid in your legs that causes them to appear swollen.

Lymphoedema is swelling in your legs as a result of an infection or damage to the lymphatic system. This may cause:

- your legs and ankles to become swollen
- your skin to become thickened
- noticeable pronounced skin creases or folds
- you to experience regular attacks of infection in the affected limb (a skin infection can be painful, hot to touch, red and swollen)