# UNDERSTANDING YOUR LEG ULCER TREATMENT

BRITISH SKIN FOUNDATION

Accredits Urgo Medical research in wound healing and healthy skin

URGO MEDICAL
Healing people®

## TO BE COMPLETED BY YOUR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL:

Patient name: .....

Right leg ABPI: .....

Date assessed: .....

Left leg ABPI: .....

Date assessed: .....

Diagnosis of leg ulcer (Please state)

.....

.....

Type of compression used (please include bandaging and hosiery)

.....

.....

## YOUR NURSE HAS DIAGNOSED THAT YOU HAVE A LEG ULCER

This booklet is a guide to understanding your leg ulcer, the recommended treatment and what you can do to aid your recovery.

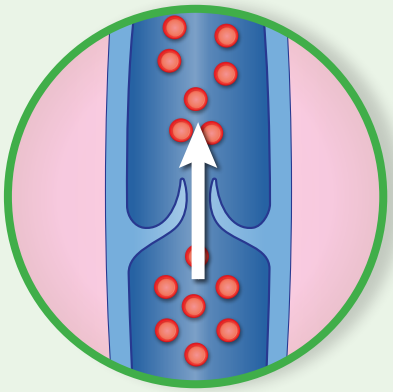
## SOME OF YOUR SYMPTOMS MAY INCLUDE:

- **Swollen ankles**
- **Discoloration and darkening of the skin around the lower leg**
- **Dry, itchy, flaky skin**
- **Hard, dry skin with a woody appearance**
- **Pain and / or a 'heavy' feeling in the affected leg**
- **Chronic swelling (oedema)**

## WHAT CAUSES A LEG ULCER?

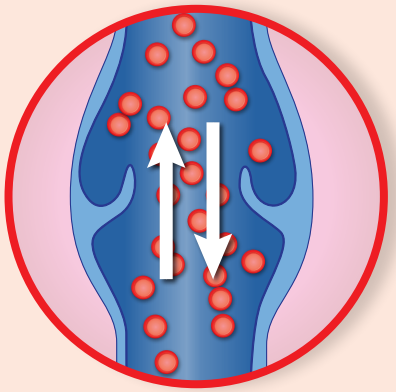
A leg ulcer can develop after a minor injury if there's a problem with the blood circulation in your leg's veins.

### Healthy Veins



Normal healthy veins in the legs take blood back to the heart. When walking around or exercising, the calf muscle squeezes the veins to pump the blood in the right direction. As a result valves in the veins stop the blood from flowing backwards due to gravity.

### Damaged Veins



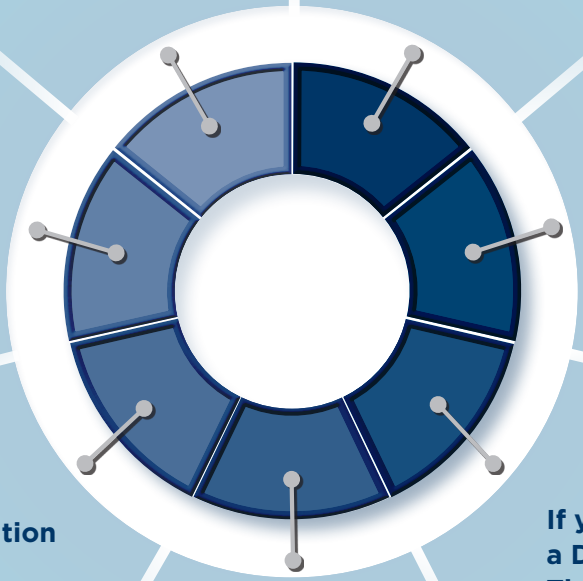
Damaged veins and valves in the legs cause the blood to flow the wrong way, back down your legs. This makes the pressure in the veins increase, causing fluid to leak into the tissues underneath the skin, starving the skin of necessary nutrients. This can cause the skin to become fragile and increase the likelihood of a leg ulcer developing.

# WHAT FACTORS INCREASE THE RISK OF DEVELOPING A LEG ULCER?

Age – the older you get, the greater the risk

Obesity – excess weight contributes to high blood pressure

A leg injury in the past – e.g. a broken bone



A history of varicose veins

Heart Condition

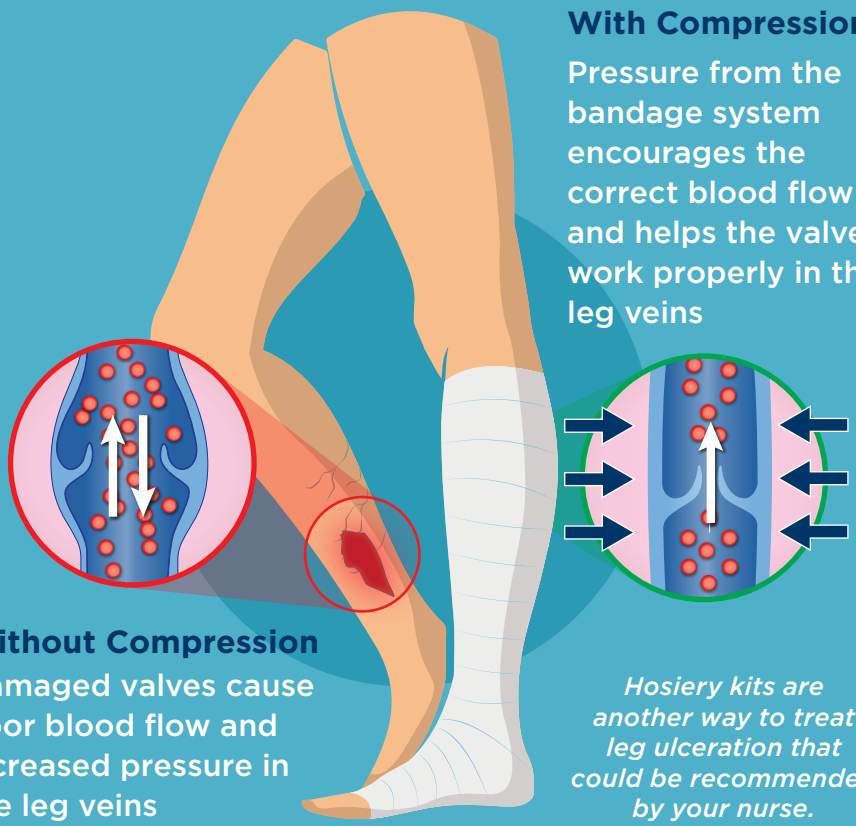
If you have had a Deep Vein Thombosis (DVT)

Immobility or long periods of standing and not using the calf muscle 'pump' can increase the pressure in the veins

# WHY ARE COMPRESSION BANDAGES RECOMMENDED FOR HEALING?

The recommended treatment for leg ulcers is compression bandaging.

These bandages are specially designed to apply the correct external pressure that helps your leg ulcer to heal. They gently, but firmly, hug the leg to help the valves work properly, improving the blood flow back towards the heart and reducing the fluid (oedema) in the tissues.



**With Compression**

**Pressure from the bandage system encourages the correct blood flow and helps the valves work properly in the leg veins**

**Without Compression**

**Damaged valves cause poor blood flow and increased pressure in the leg veins**

*Hosiery kits are another way to treat leg ulceration that could be recommended by your nurse.*

Research has shown that compression systems which applies the correct pressure, is **essential** to healing your leg ulcer – a dressing on its own is not enough!

There are different types of compression bandages with 2, 3 or 4 layers or hosiery kits.
Your nurse will talk to you about the best option for your leg ulcer.

Bandages should be changed weekly during your treatment, unless your nurse thinks there is a reason to change them more frequently.

## HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE FOR YOUR LEG ULCER TO HEAL?

The average healing time can vary depending on your diagnosis and can take longer if you have any other medical issues.

Without compression, healing time can significantly increase.

## OTHER PATIENTS SAY:

*"I am a firm believer in compression therapy and the difference in healing has improved dramatically [2]"*

*"The 3 months I was out of compression it spread further. I did see the benefit and I was desperate to get back into compression[2]"*

# PRESCRIPTION MODEL SIZE SELECTOR

**LimbOs** are reusable and have been recommended throughout the NHS for over 20 years. To help patients with lower leg dressings, adult lower leg models are available on prescription as follows:

Simply select your height and weight. The PIP code is for the prescriber's reference.

| Patient Height | Patient Weight | Model | PIP Code |
|---|---|---|---|
| **5'5" (165cm) and above** | Up to 9 stone (57kg) | MP76 Slim Leg | 333-7581 |
| | 9 to 16 stone (57kg to 102kg) | MP80 Average Build | 320-0045 |
| | Over 16 stone (102kg) | MP180 Large Leg | 320-0060 |
| **Under 5'5" (165cm)** | Up to 9 stone (57kg) | MP76S Slim Leg Short | 333-7599 |
| | 9 to 16 stone (57kg to 102kg) | MP80S Short Leg | 320-0052 |
| | Over 16 stone (102kg) | MP180S Large Leg Short | 320-0078 |

For advice or to purchase directly please phone **01243 573417** or visit **www.limboproducts.co.uk**

**LimbOs** are a great way to protect PICC lines and casts too!

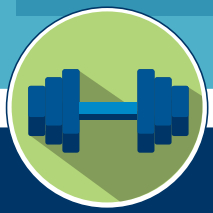
# CAN I HAVE A SHOWER OR A BATH WHEN WEARING COMPRESSION BANDAGES?

We know a bath or shower can transform your day and general well-being. This becomes difficult and frustrating with bandages that need to be kept dry. We don't want you to miss out on this important daily routine, so with a **LimbO** Waterproof Protector you can shower or bath with ease and peace of mind.

100% waterproof and with a full range of sizes, the **LimbO** is simple to put on and comfortable to use, with a gentle and flexible neoprene seal. The **LimbO** helps restore your quality of life, avoid wet dressings and the risk of infection.

LimbO®
Waterproof protectors

# HOW CAN I HELP MY LEG ULCER TO HEAL?



## Regular daily exercise

The best way to exercise the calf muscle and **help blood to pump** is by walking, however this might not be possible for everyone. If this is not possible, here are some simple daily exercises to help:

**Wiggle or curl your toes** while sitting.

**Point your toes up and down** while sitting.

**Rotate your ankle** in both directions.

## Elevate your legs – put your feet up!

This will help to reduce the swelling if you **raise your feet above the level of your hips** – try putting a cushion on the coffee table to raise your feet when sitting or under your feet when resting on the bed – **make sure your feet are higher than your hips!**

## Eat a healthy balanced diet

Eating the right food will give your body the **nutrients** it needs to help your leg ulcer heal. Meat, fish, eggs and cheese are high in protein – fruit and vegetables are good for **vitamins & minerals**. It is also important to drink **plenty of fluids**, especially water.

## Wear sensible footwear

It is not easy to find shoes which fit over bandages but it is **important that they are comfortable**, supportive and don't rub!

# HOW CAN I CARE FOR MY LEG ULCER WHEN WEARING COMPRESSION BANDAGES?

It is important NOT to remove or change the way in which your bandages have been applied. It is very important to wear your bandages at all times as not wearing them continuously will impact the healing time.

Only remove your bandages if you are advised to by your nurse.

## CAUTION

Please contact your nurse straight away if you notice any changes listed below as it may be necessary to remove the compression bandage if advised to do so by your nurse.

- Numbness or tingling of your toes
- Cramp
- Bluish discoloration of your toes
- Excessive coldness
- Pain more severe than usual
- A bandage that has slipped down or moved
- Unusual swelling of your toes/knees
- Itching of your leg that is more than usual
- Redness of the skin and an unpleasant odour

# HOW CAN I HELP PREVENT ANOTHER LEG ULCER FROM RECURRING?

The underlying condition that causes leg ulcers cannot be reversed (i.e cured), so you need to work with your nurse to help prevent another ulcer from recurring.

If you notice any further changes in your skin on your lower leg or if your skin is broken (eg: fall / injury / insect bite) please seek advice from your Healthcare professional.

Once your leg ulcer is healed, your nurse will prescribe compression stockings / socks (e.g. Altiform) to prevent recurrence. Your skin will still be very fragile so it is important to wear these every day.
The stockings will apply the compression needed to help maintain the blood flow in the legs. Your nurse will give you advice on how to put them on, wear them and care for them.

**How often should my stockings be replaced?[1]**

Compression stockings should be replaced every 3–6 months. Ideally, each time a stocking is replaced, the leg should be re-measured.

The size of the leg can change over time (e.g. because of reduction in oedema). Measuring the leg each time a new stocking is dispensed ensures that your stocking continues to fit properly.

**How frequently should I be re-assessed by my by healthcare professional?[1]**

All patients should be reviewed every 3-6 months to:

- Reassess the condition for which the stocking is being prescribed
- Ensure that the person is continuing to wear the stocking successfully and is replacing them regularly
- Repeat leg measurements to ensure that the stocking continues to be the correct size

Ideally, Doppler studies should be repeated every 6–12 months or earlier if clinically indicated. Follow local policies, if available.

## YOU CAN HELP TO PREVENT YOUR LEG ULCER FROM RETURNING BY FOLLOWING THE ADVICE BELOW:

Continue **regular exercise** to keep the calf muscle 'pump' active to help blood flow back to the heart properly.

**Use plenty of moisturiser** to stop the skin from becoming dry and wear comfortable, well-fitting shoes.

**Lose weight** if you need to: this will help your blood pressure and benefit your overall health.

**Eat a healthy balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids.**

**Give up smoking**
Smoking will damage your veins and arteries and increase the risk of recurrence.

## OTHER PATIENTS SAY:

*"I miss not being totally immersed in water, my bucket list is going swimming when I'm healed, I miss swimming big time[2]"*

*"I took myself away from so many social things because of the hassle of it and the fact that I don't like the smell, you know it's there, if you sit in a chair, it rises[2]"*

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR NURSE AT YOUR NEXT APPOINTMENT:

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## IS THERE AN OCCASION YOU WOULD LIKE TO HEAL IN TIME FOR?

Write it here .....

You can do this by e-mailing your story along with your before and after wound images to:

**Woundcare@uk.urgo.com**

or by post:

**Urgo Limited**
**Free Post**
**MID 25404**
**Loughborough**
**LE12 5BR**

## OTHER USEFUL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Societies and websites where you can find further information, advice and support to help you with your leg ulcer:

Lindsay Leg Club Foundation
**www.legclub.org**

Leg Ulcer Forum
**www.legulcerforum.org**

Royal College of Nursing
**www.rcn.org.uk**

The Vascular Society
**www.vascularsociety.org.uk**

The Circulation Foundation
**www.circulationfoundation.org.uk**

## FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Healthcare Professional Details

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190780 February 2020

**Reference**
**1.** https://cks.nice.org.uk/compression-stockings#!scenario
**2.** Patient focus group, Manchester, June 2017

**Urgo Limited,**
**Sullington Road, Shepshed, Loughborough, LE12 9JG**
**Tel: 0330 128 0898 Email: Woundcare@uk.urgo.com**
**Web: www.urgo.co.uk**

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