

Venous disorders of the lower leg explained

Leg Ulcer Management Team Patient Information Leaflet

Introduction

This leaflet is for people who have a problem with the circulation of blood in their lower leg veins, known as a venous disorder.

The leaflet gives you more information about what veins do, what happens when they do not work properly and what you can do to help prevent damage to your skin.

What do veins do?

Veins collect used blood and carry it upwards back to your heart. The veins rely mainly on the movement of your legs to do this. When the muscles move, they squeeze the veins and this pushes the blood upwards. Small valves inside the veins stop the blood from flowing back down the veins.

What causes vein problems?

- The valves may have been damaged by a blood clot, known medically as deep vein thrombosis (DVT).
- During pregnancy, the valves can become damaged. For this reason, pregnant women should ask for advice to prevent problems with their legs.
- Sometimes, long periods of standing or sitting without moving your leg muscles can cause pressure in the veins to rise. If this pressure rises too high, the valves cannot hold the pressure and they may start to leak.
- Being overweight can cause damage to the valves.

These problems may affect the ability of veins to transport blood back up to the heart.

What happens when veins cannot transport blood back to the heart?

Pressure builds up and causes congestion in the veins. This causes your veins to swell, and over time, your ankles will swell too. Red blood cells leak out of these swollen veins under the skin in your legs. You will see this as dark patches on your skin. The skin on your legs may become red and itchy.

This constant high pressure can gradually damage the tiny blood vessels in your skin and make it fragile. As a result, your skin can easily break after a knock or scratch.

The congestion also means that arteries struggle to bring in fresh, healthy blood that has oxygen and nutrients in it. This means that a minor scratch may become a wound that is difficult to heal, such as a leg ulcer.

How can the congestion be treated?

To help prevent damage to your skin, it is important to reduce the congestion in your veins.

The best way of doing this is to wear compression stockings on your legs. Your leg ulcer clinic coordinator, nurse or health professional can assess you for these.

Sometimes if the swelling is very bad, it can be reduced first by compression bandages before the stockings are fitted. There are leaflets explaining compression stockings and bandages. We will give you these, if needed.

Other aspects to consider are:

- Exercise – try to keep active
- Eat a healthy diet
- Watch your weight
- Get good bed rest at night and avoid sleeping in a chair
- Care for your skin to keep it healthy

Can I find out more?

You can find out more from the following website:

NHS Choices

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Leg-ulcer-venous/Pages/Treatment.aspx>

Leg Ulcer Management Team contact details

01384 321425 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

Leg Ulcer Management Team
Brierley Hill Health and Social Care Centre
Venture Way
Brierley Hill
DY5 1RU

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:

<http://dudleygroup.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/patient-information-leaflets/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email patient.information@dgh.nhs.uk

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.

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Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

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Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru vă rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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