

What is a venous leg ulcer?

Leg Ulcer Management Team Patient Information Leaflet

Introduction

This leaflet is for people who have a venous leg ulcer. It gives you information about what a venous leg ulcer is, how they are caused and how they can be prevented.

What is a venous leg ulcer?

A leg ulcer is a long-lasting sore that takes more than two weeks to heal. Venous leg ulcers are usually caused by problems with circulation of blood in lower leg veins. They usually develop on the inside of the leg, just above the ankle.

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 venous leg ulcers?

Sometimes the valves inside veins become damaged and affect the ability of veins to transport blood back to the heart properly. This causes pressure to build up, leading to congestion in the veins. Due to this congestion, your veins will swell, particularly around your ankles.

This problem happens over a long time – you may have noticed swollen veins and perhaps some varicose veins. This is a sign of congestion in your leg.

The congestion in your leg makes the skin very fragile and a knock or scratch can take a long time to heal, sometimes more than six weeks. This is known as a venous ulcer. Please note: most people who just have varicose veins do not develop an ulcer.

Why do my ankles swell?

The congestion in your leg causes extra fluid to build up in your ankles. This gets worse if you stand for a long time because the blood flow slows down. If the swelling is not treated, it can make the situation worse.

How is it treated?

Treatment is often a combination of medicine, compression bandages, hosiery or wrap garments, and exercise. It is important to put your feet up when you are sitting down and to get a good rest in bed at night.

Why has the skin on my leg changed colour?

The congestion makes your veins swell. The swollen veins allow some of the red blood cells to leak out of your veins into your leg, just under the skin.

This causes the colour of your skin to change a little. It is a sign of the problem in your leg and helps healthcare professionals decide what the problem is.

Why is the skin on my legs so dry?

The congestion in your leg stretches the skin which makes it more delicate. It also makes it difficult for new, fresh blood to get to your leg as it used to.

This means that natural moisturisers are not produced to keep the skin supple and healthy. The skin becomes dry and flaky, and it may itch a little. It is important to protect the skin and not to scratch it.

Your leg ulcer clinic coordinator, nurse or health professional will advise you on how to wash your leg and which moisturiser to use. You will need to use products that do not irritate your skin. You should tell your nurse/healthcare professional of any problems with your skin as soon as they happen.

How long will the ulcer take to heal?

In many cases, a venous ulcer may heal within three months. If the ulcer is very large or if there are problems with other types of blood vessels, it may take longer.

The important thing is to discuss your care with your nurse/healthcare professional and to wear the item of compression therapy that has been prescribed to you. Compression, whether bandages, wrap or hosiery, is a very important part of your treatment as it will help to speed up the flow of blood in your veins.

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://dgft.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/patient-information-leaflets/>

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

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

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此宣传单可提供大字版本、音频版本和其它语言版本，请拨打电话：0800 073 0510。

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 să sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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