



Patient & Family Guide

2022

Venous Leg Ulcers



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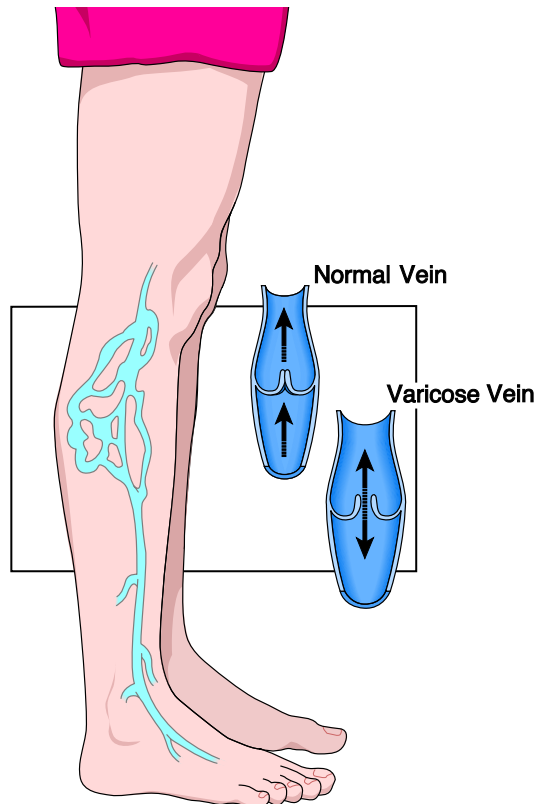
What are venous leg ulcers?

- The words 'leg ulcer' are used to describe a variety of open sores below the knee that are slow to heal.
- Many of these ulcers are caused by problems in the veins. The veins in the lower legs are under a lot of stress. They have to push blood from your feet back up to your heart. The small valves in the veins must keep the blood flowing in one direction.
- The veins in your calves have muscle pumps that provide a boost to blood flow to help blood return to the heart. Blood may have trouble returning to your heart if there is damage to the veins or lower leg (calf) muscle pump.
- If the blood does not move toward your heart, fluid will leak into the tissues. This causes swelling and ulcers in the lower legs.

What causes venous leg ulcers?

Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) – This is when a blood clot forms in a deep vein in your leg or arm. The blood clot may get large enough to block the flow of blood in the affected leg(s). You may have a DVT and not know it.

- › Age (may happen before 40, but risk increases with age)
- › Sex (affects more females than males)
- › Family history
- › Smoking
- › Pregnancy
- › Obesity
- › Trauma to the leg



What are the symptoms of venous leg ulcers?

- › Swelling of the lower leg
- › Itchy skin
- › Brown discolouration of the skin around the ankles and lower leg
- › Ulcers vary in appearance, they are often beefy red in colour and have an irregular shape
- › Medium to heavy drainage (fluid) from the ulcer
- › Pain

How are venous leg ulcers treated?

Treatment will:

- Try to improve blood flow
- Help the ulcer heal

You can improve blood flow by:

- Resting with your leg lifted above the level of your heart

- Compression therapy (like compression stockings)
 - › Compression therapy helps blood return to your heart and controls swelling.
 - › Pressure is applied to the affected lower leg(s) with compression stockings or layers of bandages. Your doctor or nurse will talk with you about which choice is right for you.

You can help the ulcer heal by:

- Wearing the right wound dressing. The choice of dressing will depend on the amount of drainage, the size of the ulcer, the condition of the surrounding skin, and if the ulcer is infected. Your doctor or nurse will talk with you about the best dressing for your ulcer.

How can I prevent a venous leg ulcer from coming back?

- Once the ulcer has healed, your main goal must be preventing further ulcers.
- There is no cure for venous leg ulcers, but they can be managed by wearing compression stockings. **If you stop wearing your compression stockings, the ulcer may come back.**

- Lift your legs above the level of your heart for 30 minutes, 4 times a day.

Tips for compression stockings:

- Put your stockings on first thing in the morning and take them off in the evening before bed. If your stockings feel too tight to put on, lift your legs above the level of your heart for 30 minutes and then try again.
- **Only use the stockings for 6 months.** Buy another pair after 6 months.
- **Do not** put your stockings in the dryer.
- Moisturize your legs at night after taking off your stockings.

For questions about your venous leg ulcer(s), please call:

› Phone: _____

