Preventing Venous Ulcers

Information for patients and families

Read this information to learn:

• what a venous ulcer is
• how it is treated
• how to prevent them from coming back
What is a venous ulcer?

A venous ulcer is a wound that develops on your lower leg. It often develops just above your ankle.

Your veins carry blood from various parts of your body to your heart. Your veins have valves in them to keep your blood from flowing back down. When these valves don’t work properly, the blood pools and creates pressure (also called *venous pressure*) in your lower legs. Over time, this can damage your skin and cause an ulcer.
What does a venous ulcer look like?
A venous ulcer can be:
- a darker coloured area of skin
- a dry, crusty scab
- an open sore that leaks fluid
- yellow, pink, red or brown in colour

What does it feel like?
A venous ulcer can feel itchy, like a burn, and/or painful.

How is it treated?
Your doctor will order compression bandages for your leg. These bandages are tight. They help the muscles in your leg push the blood back up through the veins. Compression bandages will reduce the venous pressure in your leg. Reducing this pressure will allow the ulcer to heal. The tight bandages may help to reduce pain from the ulcer. You will also need wound care until your ulcer is healed.

A vascular surgeon may examine you to see if surgery or endovenous laser ablation would help. These procedures would remove or destroy the vein or veins that have the faulty valves.

It can take many months for the ulcer to close, even with these treatments.
How can I prevent a venous ulcer from coming back?

There are many things you can do to prevent venous leg ulcers:

• **Wear graduated compression stockings.**
  ▪ You will need a prescription from your doctor for compression stockings.
  ▪ You should see a certified stocking fitter who will measure your legs to be sure you are wearing the correct size for you.
  ▪ You will need to wear them all day, from morning until night. You can take them off when you go to sleep.
  ▪ You will need to replace your stockings every 3 to 6 months because they will stop working when they wear out.

  ![Compression stockings](image)
  Compression stockings put pressure on your veins to prevent blood from pooling in your legs.

• **Take care of your skin.**
  ▪ Every day, moisturize (put cream on) your legs after you take your stockings off. Don’t moisturize before you put them on because it may affect the elastic in the stockings.
  ▪ Wear sunscreen when you are in the sun.
  ▪ Check your feet and legs daily for cuts or sores.

• **Raise your legs whenever you can.**
  ▪ Raise your legs and feet above the level of your heart when you are resting. This will help your blood flow up your legs more easily.
• **Exercise.**
  - Walking is the best exercise you can do to help push the blood towards your heart. When you walk, your **calf muscle pump** moves blood towards your heart.
  - Wear your compression stockings when you are walking.
  - If you cannot walk, do ankle exercises when you rest. Do this by circling your ankle and foot to the right and then to the left.
  - Try to avoid standing in 1 spot for a long time.

• **Eat healthy foods.**
  - Try to keep a healthy weight for your height. Being overweight can put extra pressure on your legs.

• **Stop smoking.**
  - Smoking affects your circulation (how well blood moves around your body). Smoking will cause your wound to take longer to heal.

• **Try to avoid injury.**
  - Be careful with your legs. An injury, like a cut or other damage to your skin could cause another venous ulcer.
  - Avoid very hot or cold temperatures. This could injure your skin.

If you have signs of a venous ulcer, see your doctor early for treatment.