

**Leg ulcers are common in the general population. A leg ulcer is a wound on the lower leg that is slow to heal. It can vary in size and depth, and may cause pain, irritation, leakage and odour.**

There are different causes of leg ulceration; this leaflet is designed for people with venous leg ulceration.

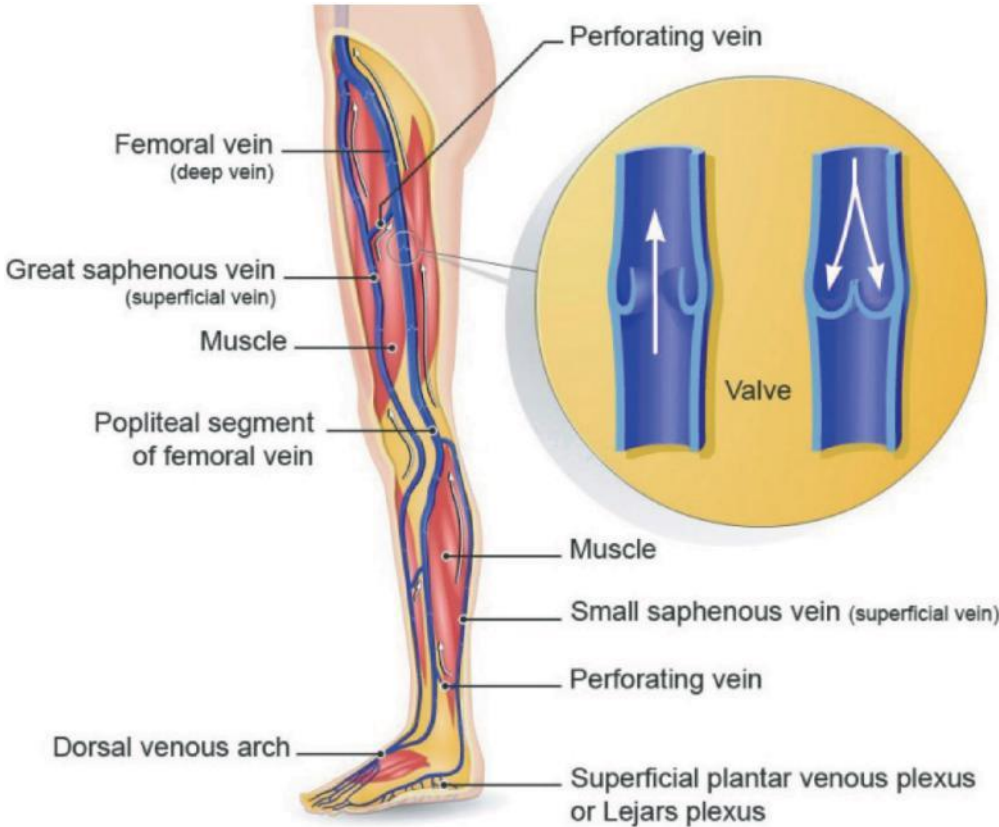


Image courtesy of Urgo Medical

**Normal flow of blood through your legs**

Blood from the heart flows down the legs through arteries then travels through the skin in capillaries and is returned to the heart by veins.

Blood passing through the veins is assisted on its return to the heart by the muscles in your calves squeezing the veins and by valves in the veins closing properly so that blood can only pass in one direction i.e. up the leg towards the heart.

**What causes venous leg ulcers?**

The leg veins can become damaged allowing blood to pass back into the small veins near the surface of the skin which may cause varicose veins and eczema (skin irritation and itching).

Blood also collects in the lower leg causing pressure to build up and fluid from the capillaries seeps out into the skin, this results in swelling of the legs known as oedema. This swelling stops the normal flow of blood to the skin and as a result the skin does not receive enough nutrients from the blood. It can then start to break down and an ulcer can appear. An ulcer may also develop following a traumatic injury to your leg which is not able to heal due to the swelling in your leg caused by poor return of blood through your veins.

**What can be done to help?**

The most important part of healing a venous leg ulcer is to improve the blood supply to the skin. To achieve this, the swelling in the leg must be reduced and the veins need to be given help to move the blood from the legs towards the heart. This is accomplished in three main ways:

- Compression therapy
- Leg elevation
- Simple leg and foot exercises

In addition, the skin on the lower legs and feet must be cared for and

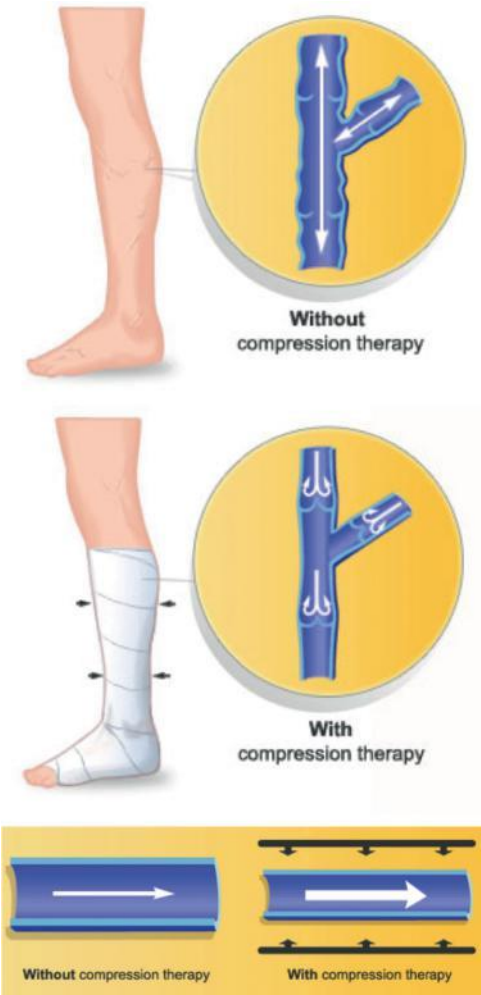
kept healthy. Your nurse will advise you of how this can be achieved.

Images courtesy of Urgo Medical

**Compression therapy**

Compression therapy can be applied as a bandage, stocking or wrap, your nurse will discuss with you the most appropriate type of compression to help your ulcer to heal.

The main effects of compression are to restore the function of valves in the veins by bringing the walls of the veins closer together and reduce the diameter of the vein.



**Compression bandages**

If a compression bandage is used, it will be applied from the base of your toes to just below your knee and if levels of leakage from your ulcer allow, it is normal practice for it to be left in place for up to one week to help promote wound healing.

If you experience any unusual tightness, pain or discomfort in your leg or foot you must contact your nurse immediately as the bandage will need to be removed.

Your bandage must be kept dry therefore if you wish to take a bath or shower you need to ask your nurse to arrange a prescription for a special cover that you to apply to prevent the bandages getting wet.

**Compression stockings and wraps**

If a compression stocking or wrap is used it is ideally applied when any swelling has been removed from your leg to allow the stocking or wrap to work effectively, the swelling will need to be removed by you having a compression bandage applied initially. Once the swelling has been reduced with the bandage your nurse can then measure your leg for the most appropriate size of stocking or wrap. If levels of leakage from your ulcer allow it is normal practice for the dressing then stocking or wrap to be left in place day and night for up to one week to promote healing.

## Leg elevation

You should elevate your legs at all times when resting. This helps reduce the swelling by lowering the pressure in the veins of the leg. If you are able the best way to achieve this is to lie on your bed or settee with your legs raised on a pillow or cushion. If you are not able to do this it will help to put your feet up on a stool.

## Simple leg and foot exercises

It is important that you exercise as walking makes the muscles in your legs squeeze the veins and helps the return of blood from your legs to your heart. As well as walking you should carry out regular ankle, foot and toe exercises to improve your circulation and strengthen your muscles.

## Exercises

The simple exercises overleaf can be performed several times throughout the day for short periods of five to ten minutes, they can be performed when lying down or sitting in a chair.

These exercises use the calf muscle pump which helps to return blood to your heart. It is important that if you feel tired during these exercises or experience any discomfort that you stop and rest. If you are unsure of how to perform any of the exercises please ask your nurse and they will demonstrate them to you.

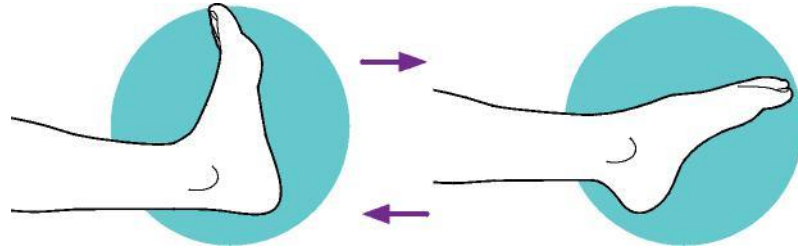


## Toe exercises



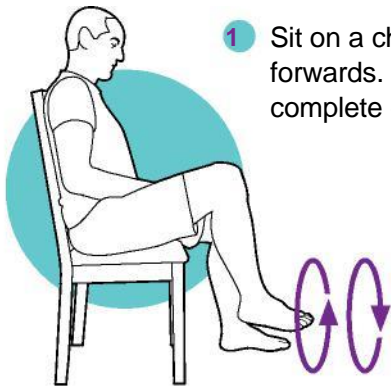
- 1 Curl your toes under then straighten them fully
- 2 Move your toes up and down

## Ankle exercises



- 1 Put your legs out straight in front of you
- 2 Bend your ankle and point your toes upwards as far as possible and then bend your ankle and point your toes away as far as possible

## Foot exercises



- 1 Sit on a chair place both feet on the floor pointing forwards. Raise one foot off the floor and turn it in a complete circle clockwise and then turn it anticlockwise.



- 2 Sit on a chair with your feet on the floor pointing forwards and lift your heel off the floor as far as possible keeping your toes on the floor at the same time.

## Can anything else help to heal a venous leg ulcer?

- Aim to eat a healthy well balanced diet
- If you smoke try to stop as smoking will delay healing. Your nurse or GP can provide the details of where you can obtain help to do this
- Do not interfere with your dressings or bandages or apply non-prescribed remedies. If you have any concerns about your dressing or bandage please contact your nurse for advice.

## Clinic or Nurse Contact:

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Further help and information can be found at [www.legsmatter.org](http://www.legsmatter.org)

If you would like this information in another language or format such as larger print, please contact: **0800 561 2121**

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Jeżeli życzy sobie Pan/Pani otrzymać niniejsze informacje w innym języku lub formacie, takim jak duża czcionka, należy zadzwonić pod nr tel.: **0800 561 2121**

در صورت تمایل به داشتن این اطلاعات به زبانی دیگر یا فرمی دیگر، به طور مثال، چاپ بزرگ تر، لطفاً با شماره تلفن: **۰۸۰۰۵۶۱۲۱۲۱** تماس بگیرید

## Getting in touch with CityCare

You can feed back any compliments, concerns, complaints or comments by:

T: 0115 883 9654

E: [ncp.customercare@nhs.net](mailto:ncp.customercare@nhs.net)

W: [www.nottinghamcitycare.nhs.uk](http://www.nottinghamcitycare.nhs.uk)

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Version 7



# Venous Leg Ulceration

Information leaflet for patients



NHS