



Tissue Viability

Looking After Your Legs

A patient information leaflet
Tissue Viability Service

What's it all about?

This leaflet sets out some useful hints and tips that will help to prevent, assist in healing and reduce the risk of recurrence of leg ulcers.

Why do I need to look after my legs?

Good blood flow is important in keeping skin and tissues healthy. Blood is pumped from our heart to the rest of our body through our arteries and returns to our heart through our veins. Our leg and foot muscles help pump the circulating blood along as we walk and move our ankles. The most common cause of poor healing on the lower leg is disease of the veins. Our veins contain one-way valves to stop backflow of blood towards our feet. These valves can become weak or damaged. When this happens, our veins become so swollen that fluid and blood can be forced into the tissues. This makes our skin swollen, fragile, and unable to heal as normal. This is the most common cause of wounds on a leg that don't heal properly, called leg ulcers.

What can I do to help keep my legs healthy?

Lifestyle

Eating well, maintaining a healthy weight and getting a balance between exercise and rest/elevation will all help prevent the ulcers recurring.

Eat well and Maintain a Healthy Weight

Having a well-balanced diet is important for keeping our skin in optimal condition and plays an important role in helping wounds to heal. Make sure to keep hydrated by drinking plenty of water.



For further nutritional advice, please visit:

[https:// www.nhs.uk/Livewell/healthy-eating/Pages/Healthyeating.aspx](https://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/healthy-eating/Pages/Healthyeating.aspx)

Exercise

Exercise is important as it promotes healthy circulation and improves your general wellbeing. When you walk the muscles in your legs help squeeze your veins which helps the blood to flow properly. If you are unable to walk, then doing foot exercises can be just as effective. Try to incorporate exercise into your daily routine as much as you can, with periods of rest and elevation in-between.

Here are some simple exercises you can try every day:

Exercise 1: Move the toes of the foot up and down five times.



Exercise 2: Rotate the ankle five times clockwise and then five times anti clockwise



Exercise 3: Sitting in a chair, lift your heels five times.



For further advice or exercises go to:

<https://www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/Fitness/Pages/Fitnesshome.aspx>

Elevation

- When sitting, try to elevate your legs to at least level with your hips. This helps to improve the return blood flow from your feet.
- Putting pillows on a foot stool is an option or placing pillows under your legs when laying on the sofa. Be mindful to support your legs so that all the weight isn't on your heels.
- Going to bed at night is important for your blood flow.
- Avoid sleeping in a chair overnight as this can contribute to poor circulation and increase swelling.



Skin care

- Avoid using perfumed soaps when showering and bathing. These can dry the skin and strip it of its natural oils.
- Always dry carefully and gently—harsh rubbing with hard towels can cause damage.
- Apply a non-perfumed emollient/moisturiser daily, to keep your skin nourished and hydrated.
- Look after your feet and toenails, keeping any podiatry appointments is a must.

Give up smoking

Smoking causes damage to your circulatory system; this increases the risk of damage to your skin & can result in leg ulcers. Smoking can also make it more difficult for them to heal and they are also more likely to reoccur.



You can ask your GP, nurse or pharmacist for advice and help to quit or visit: <https://www.nhs.uk/smokefree>

Footwear

Your footwear should be comfortable, well fitted and safe. This is important as ill-fitting shoes which are tight can cause pressure damage resulting in wounds. You should be aware of any altered sensation in your feet, especially numbness or reduced sensation. This should be reported to your GP especially if you are diabetic.



Things to look out for

You need to keep an eye on your legs. If you have any concerns you should contact your community nurse, practice nurse or GP.

Ask carers to do this for you if you are unable.

This may include:

- If there is a break in the skin that is not getting better
- You notice any changes in your foot colour and/or temperature
- You experience leg pain or cramp at night
- You experience excessive itchiness
- Your legs are becoming more swollen
- If your leg becomes, hot swollen, red and painful, contact your medical practice immediately.

Compression Therapy to Prevent and Heal Ulcers

Compression therapy helps our veins work better, controls any swelling and is an essential part of any treatment plan.

Compression therapy improves blood supply by applying pressure to the leg. This can be done by bandaging the lower leg or by wearing supportive socks, stockings or wrap garments. Compression therapy is very effective at reducing swelling and healing or preventing sores or ulcers. There are lots of different types of compression therapy and your nurse will discuss which is the most suitable options for you.



Compression can feel a little uncomfortable when you first start treatment but should not cause you any pain. Any discomfort should reduce as the swelling goes down. If you do experience discomfort, talk to your nurse or doctor about it and they will advise you on ways of alleviating this.

Once Your Leg Ulcers Have Healed

Unfortunately, even when your legs are healed the underlying cause is still likely to be present and will therefore need to be managed. Leg ulcer aftercare has been shown to be vital and adopting the advice in this leaflet will reduce the risk of your ulcer returning.

You may have been given compression garments to wear such as stockings or wrap garments. These garments are designed to be supportive and will help the blood flow in your veins. They work in the same way as the compression bandages used for treating a leg ulcer. Without this, there is a higher risk of ulceration recurring.

It is important that these are worn every day.



Caring for your compression garment

You can machine wash your hosiery garment on a low temperature but should avoid fabric softeners.

Do not tumble dry on a high heat or place on a radiator or hot pipes, as this will damage the garments. Dry them naturally if you can.

Allow the emollient or moisturiser to be absorbed into the skin before applying your hosiery and avoid thick, greasy emollients.

It is important that you see a health professional at least once a year to be reassessed to make sure the compression garments are still suitable for you. At the same time, they will remeasure you and provide you with new garments. Some people may need to be re-assessed more frequently. Your health professional will specify this below.

Please be mindful to contact your health care professional to arrange this follow up. This is your responsibility.

You have been prescribed the following compression garments:

Date issued: _____

Your review is due: _____

If you have any concerns, you should contact:

For further advice on lower limb conditions visit
www.legsmatter.org



If you would like to have information translated into a different language, please contact the Equality and Diversity Team at: EqualityandInclusion@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk

يُرجى الاتصال بنا إذا كنتم ترغبون في الحصول على المعلومات بلغة أخرى أو بتنسيق مختلف.

আপনি এই তথ্য অন্য ভাষায় বা আলাদা আকারে পেতে চাইলে অনুগ্রহ করে আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন।
اگر آپ یہ معلومات دیگر زبان یا مختلف فارمیٹ میں چاہتے ہیں تو برائے مہربانی ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

Chinese 若要以其他語言或格式提供這些資訊，請與我們聯繫

Polish Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku lub w innym formacie, skontaktuj się z nami.

Portuguese Queira contactar-nos se pretender as informações noutra idioma ou num formato diferente.

Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust
Trust Headquarters
Littlemore Mental Health Centre
Sandford Road
Oxford
OX4 4XN

Switchboard 01865 901 000
Email enquiries@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk
Website www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk

Become a member of our Foundation Trust
www.ohftnhs.uk/membership