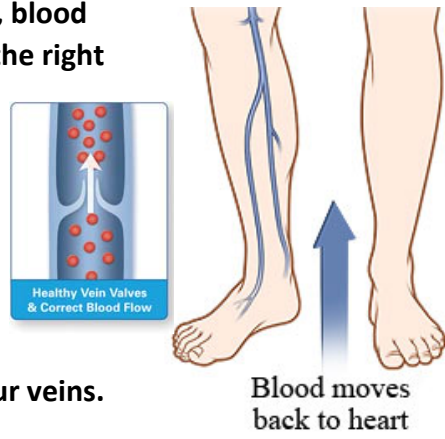


1. What is a venous leg ulcer?

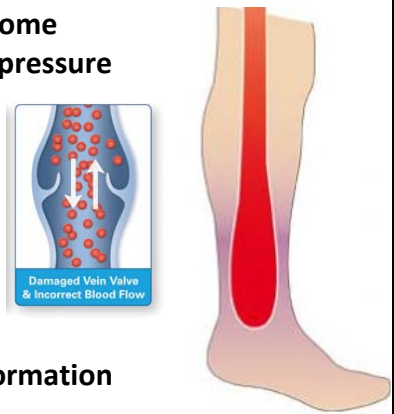
A leg ulcer is an area of damaged skin where the tissue underneath is exposed. Leg ulcers develop when there is poor blood circulation in the veins of your legs.



In healthy leg veins, blood pressure is kept at the right level by the valves in your veins. These valves prevent blood from flowing backwards and keep blood moving through your veins.



When the valves become damaged, the blood pressure in the veins of your legs will rise. This causes fluid to leak out of them leading to swelling, irritation of the skin, tenderness and eventually the formation of an ulcer.



2. Treatment for venous leg ulcers

Compression bandaging

Compression bandaging is the best treatment for a venous leg ulcer. The bandages work by helping push the blood in your leg veins back up to your heart. This allows the skin to heal.

Your nurse will put a dressing on your wound, then cover it with a compression bandage. The nurse will change your dressing and compression bandages regularly.

Manage Pain

You may or may not experience pain from your leg ulcer. If you do have pain and it prevents you from carrying out your normal daily activities, you should speak to your doctor or nurse about this.

Elevation

When resting or sleeping, you should try to keep your ankles up higher than your heart. This allows the fluid to drain from your legs.

Skin Moisturizer

Dry scaly skin around the ulcer is common. It needs to be treated with a non-perfumed moisturizer to keep the skin from drying out too much. The wound care nurse will provide information on what you do for the skin on your leg.

Exercise

Try to keep active and continue with your everyday activities. Walking can help as it pumps blood from your lower leg up to the heart. You should avoid standing still for more than a few minutes, but if you have to stand you could exercise the muscles in your lower leg by moving your toes inside your shoes or moving your feet. You can also do some exercises when you are sitting.

3. Stop venous ulcers from coming back

Ulcers will heal, but poor circulation in your veins is a chronic condition – it won't go away. Take care of yourself to stop ulcers coming back.

Compression stockings for life

You can help to prevent new ulcers by wearing compression stockings. Compression stockings apply constant pressure to your leg to improve the circulation through your veins.



It is important that you put your stockings on first thing in the morning and remove them before going to bed at night. Applicators to help you apply the stocking are available.



A health care provider will fit you for compression stockings to make sure you get the right size and tightness. He/she will also order the stockings for you. The cost of two pairs of compression stockings per year is covered for Saskatchewan residents who have had a venous ulcer – but only if you wear the stockings all the time and show that they are helping.



Other

- wear loose fitting socks and good shoes
- keep your legs raised at night
- exercise regularly, for example, take a 30 minute walk each day
- avoid bumps to the legs
- keep your feet warm but avoid hot temperatures
- use a non-perfumed moisturiser on your legs
- examine your legs regularly for broken skin and swelling.



Notes & Questions:

4. When to get help

Tell your healthcare professional if you have any of the following problems:

- broken skin
- skin irritation or redness
- swelling of the leg
- pain becoming worse
- compression stocking becoming worn or torn or not fitting comfortably.