

# How does compression improve lower limb health?

If you have been advised to wear a compression garment to manage a lower limb condition, you may find it helpful to understand how compression works. Here, we detail how compression therapy can help to improve your limb health.



If you have a condition of the lower limb, such as varicose veins, a venous leg ulcer or chronic oedema, your healthcare professional may have recommended that you wear a compression garment to help manage your condition and improve or maintain the health of your limb.

Compression therapy is the gold standard treatment for the long-term

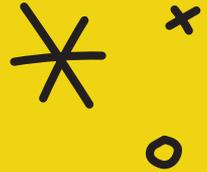
management of a variety of conditions that arise when the venous and/or lymphatic systems are not working properly.

It has been reported, however, that many wearers do not understand why they need compression or how it helps their condition. Here we explain how compression works and why it is important that it is worn in the long term to achieve maximum benefits.



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**MAKE THAT GP APPOINTMENT**

**DO SOME HEEL RAISES**

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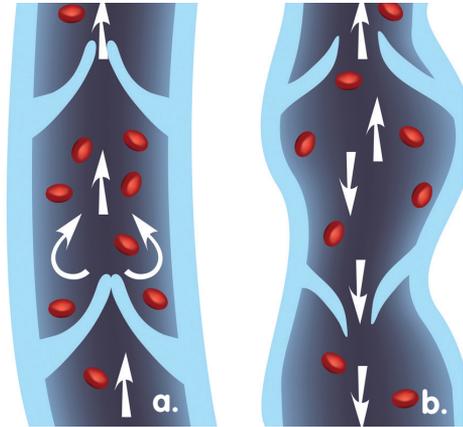
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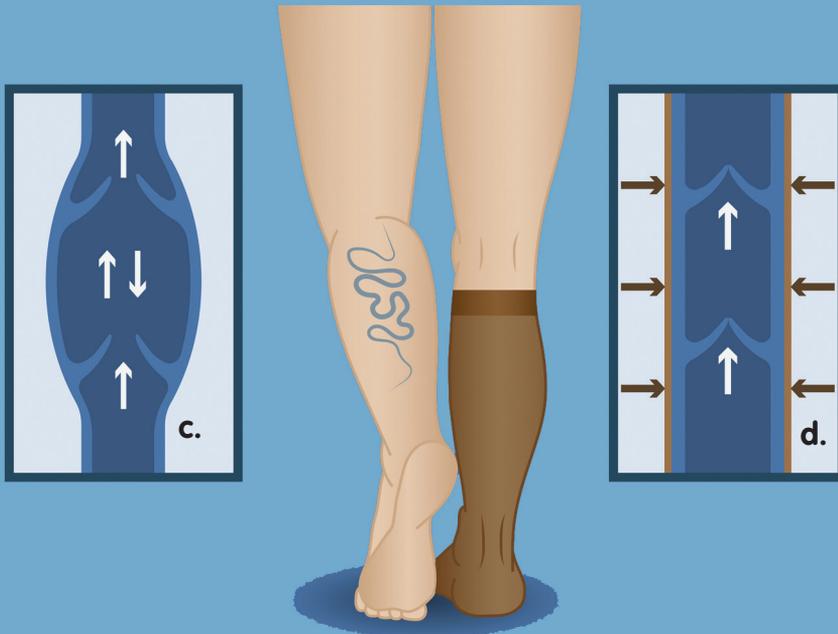
### What causes the problem?

The lower limbs have veins that return deoxygenated blood from the feet back to the heart. As the blood needs to travel upwards against gravity, the veins have a number of valves that prevent the blood from flowing backwards (a). If, however, the valve is faulty, blood can flow backwards in the vein, where it begins to pool (b), causing increased blood pressure and congestion in the tissues. In the long term, this can cause problems such as skin changes, varicose veins, swelling and eventually, ulceration.



### How does compression help?

A vein with faulty valves allows the pooling of blood (c). Lower limb compression garments work by forming a casing around the leg which enhances the contraction of the calf and foot muscles when they move (d). This provides resistance that helps the muscles to squeeze blood within the vein upwards, preventing the backflow of blood, which in turn prevents and reduces congestion within the tissues.



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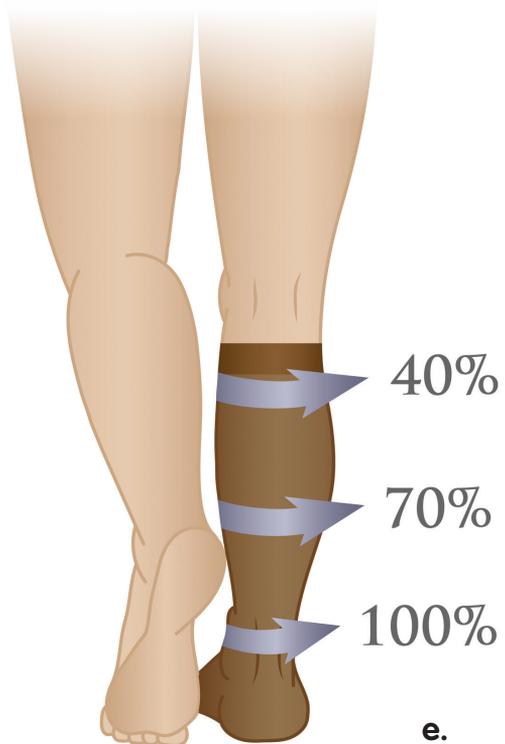
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### What is graduated compression?

Graduated compression, where the garment applies the most pressure at the ankle tapering off to apply the least pressure at the knee (e), improves blood and fluid return to the heart.

To work properly, compression therapy relies on your leg shape being thinner at the ankle and wider at the knee. Factors such as swelling or wounds which need bulky dressings may mean that your limb shape is distorted, and therefore is not the best shape for a compression garment to work effectively. In such cases, bandaging may be used so that padding can be used to return the limb to the correct proportions for graduated compression to work. Once the swelling reduces so your limb has a graduated shape or your wound has healed and no longer needs a bulky dressing, it may be possible for you to use a compression garment.



### Keep on compressing!

Compression is only effective when a garment is worn — if the garment is removed, it does not work. This is why problems often reoccur. In many cases, a wound heals or swelling reduces, so the wearer stops using compression. Failing to wear the garment, however, causes recurrence as the underlying problem is still there but is no longer being managed. To maintain your limb health in the long term, it is therefore important to wear your compression garment every day (f) to reap the benefits. ➡





It is important that you **wear your compression daily** to achieve the maximum benefit



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