

# Best in class: which garment is right for you?

Every compression garment is categorised into a class, but what does this mean and how does it affect your limb health? Here we explain why understanding the class of your garment matters.



If you wear a compression garment, you are probably familiar with its class number — usually one, two or three — followed by a number range in brackets, e.g. Class 1 (14–17mmHg). You may have noticed this written on your garment's packaging, or your healthcare professional may have advised you on what class of garment you need to wear to optimise your compression therapy. However, you might not know what this means to you and your treatment. The class of your garment may not stay the same over time; if your condition improves or worsens your compression needs may also change. It is therefore

helpful to understand what the class of your garment means and how it can affect your long-term limb health.

## **Class describes the pressure applied to your limb by your garment**

The class of a compression garment refers to the amount of pressure it delivers at certain measured points on the limb. The pressure is measured in millimetres of mercury (mmHg). For below-knee hosiery, for example, the class will refer to the amount of pressure delivered at the ankle. For a class 1 garment, a pressure range of 14–17mmHg means the garment will

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## Compression class



deliver a minimum pressure of 14mmHg and a maximum pressure of 17mmHg to the ankle, depending on the size and shape of the limb.

For a class 1 garment, the manufacturer will have a set of measurements that will ensure the garment you order is the right size for your limb and that it delivers the correct amount of compression. This is why it is important that your garment fits according to the manufacturer's guidelines. Ill-fitting compression will not deliver the right amount of pressure.

Ideally, you should be measured and assessed by a healthcare professional at regular intervals to ensure your compression garment has the correct fit and is the right garment type and class for your condition at that time. A garment that is too large will not deliver enough compression and may fall down, while a garment that is too small may be difficult to apply or could deliver too much pressure resulting in skin damage and discomfort.

### **The higher the class, the higher the pressure delivered**

Some garments deliver more pressure than others and the class of a garment communicates exactly how much pressure or compression it delivers.

The higher classes of compression garments deliver more pressure. They should only be worn once a vascular assessment has been carried out by your clinician, who will then decide if it is safe for you to wear.

Most compression garments fall into one of three classes, with class 1 delivering the least compression and class 3 the most. Some class 4 garments exist but are used less commonly, usually in specialist cases.

Class 1 garments are often referred to as 'support' garments and can usually be applied to deliver light or 'reduced' compression. While they offer gentle support, it is possible that your condition may benefit from a higher level of therapeutic compression, so you might not be getting the best therapy. For example, mild symptoms such as tired and achy legs may be managed by a light class 1 garment, whereas a more swollen limb may require a higher class of garment to help return the fluid in the limb back into the circulation and alleviate swelling.

However, the higher classes of compression garments deliver more pressure. Therefore, they should only be worn once vascular assessment has been carried out by your clinician, who will then decide if it is safe to wear. This is because in some people with circulatory disease that reduces blood flow to the limb, the pressure applied by a compression garment may further restrict blood flow, resulting in tissue damage. Classes that deliver higher pressures are sometimes made from



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## Compression class

stiffer fabric to help contain the limb.

### **Not all garments within a class are the same**

Thought you had compression class cracked?

Unfortunately, to complicate matters, not all garments in the same class deliver the same amount of pressure. This is because different manufacturers of hosiery follow different standards or 'guidelines' to determine how the amount of pressure a garment delivers is measured.

There are four main specifications that are used globally:

- » BS/UK – British standard
- » RAL/EU – European standard
- » AFNOR/FR – French standard.
- » US – US specification is based on the RAL standard.

As highlighted in the box below, a class 1 garment made to British standards will deliver a different pressure range when compared to those made to European or RAL specifications.

Remember that as a wearer of compression, it is important to work with your clinician to find a garment that is right for you.

To simplify navigating garment class, the Daylong Direct website has analysed the classes and categorised all compression garments into five groups according to

the pressure delivered: 'extra light, light, moderate, firm and extra firm' to make the selection process easier.

Remember that as a wearer of compression it is important to work in partnership with your clinician to find a garment that is right for you. Your healthcare professional should help guide you on what compression class is appropriate for your individual condition, and should also take your preferences into account.

Depending on your individual condition and circumstances, the first compression garment you try may not be the right one. If this is the case, revisit your options and try a different approach. Whatever you do, don't give up on finding a solution as compression therapy is key to maintaining your long-term limb health. ➤

	British standard	European (RAL) standard
Class 1	14–17mmHg	18–21mmHg
Class 2	18–24mmHg	23–32mmHg
Class 3	25–35mmHg	34–46mmHg

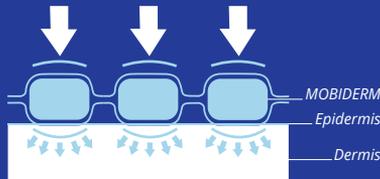


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