The class of 2019: learn all about your garment!

Every compression garment is categorised into a class of its own, but what does this mean and why is it important that you know the class of your garment? Here we explain what you need to know, because not all classes are created equally.

If you wear a compression garment, you may have noticed that the packaging states a class number, usually one, two or three, followed by a number range in brackets, e.g. Class 1 (14–17mmHg). Alternatively, you may have been told by your healthcare professional what class of garment you need to wear, but you might not know what this means to you and your compression therapy. So, here we present 'the rules of the class!'

Class equals pressure delivered

The class of a compression garment refers to the amount of pressure it delivers at certain points on the body. The pressure delivered 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 deliver a minimum pressure of 14mmHg and a maximum pressure of 17mmHg to the ankle, depending on the size and shape of the limb.

To be sure that your garment is delivering the correct amount of compression, it should fit well, according to the manufacturer's guidelines. For a class 1

garment, the manufacturer will have a set of measurements that will ensure the garment you order is the right size and that it delivers compression within the range given.

Wearing a garment that is too large will not deliver enough compression, while a garment that is too small will deliver too much pressure and could result in skin damage and restricted circulation. This is why it is best to always be measured and assessed by a healthcare professional to ensure the correct fit.

Higher the class, higher the compression

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

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.

> The class of compression hosiery refers to the amount of compression it delivers at the ankle, depending on the size and shape of the limb.

Class 1 garments are often referred to as 'support' garments and can usually be applied to deliver light or 'reduced' compression.

The downside to this is that if your condition would benefit from a higher level of therapeutic compression, you might not be getting the best from your garment.

The higher classes of garments deliver more pressure and should only be worn once vascular assessment has been carried out to confirm that it is safe to wear (*see p.6–10 for more information*). Classes that deliver higher pressures are sometimes made from stiffer fabric.

Not all classes are equal

However, not all garments in the same class deliver the same amount of pressure. This is because the manufacturers of hosiery follow different standards or 'guidelines' that guide how the amount of pressure a garment delivers is measured.

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

Across the world there are four main specifications that are used:

- 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 overleaf, a class 1 garment made to British standards will deliver a different pressure range when compared to those made to European or RAL specifications.

Your healthcare professional should help guide you on what compression class is appropriate for your individual condition, and should take your preferences into account.

If you order your compression from Daylong, we have analysed the classes and grouped all compression garments on our website into five levels according to the pressure delivered: 'extra light, light, moderate, firm and extra firm' to make the selection process easier.

Alison Schofield, Tissue Viability Nurse Specialist, North Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust comments:

'It can be difficult to navigate the sheer number of compression garments available. That is why it is really important that before wearing a garment for the first time, or renewing your gament when it has worn out, you are assessed by a healthcare professional who can advise on the right choice of product for the management of your individual condition. Remember that your health can change so a garment that was suitable 6–12 months ago may no longer be right for you.

As clinicians it is important that we remain up to date with the range of products available and mindful of what the different standards and classes mean, so we can use this to make decisions and pass on this information for the benefit our patients. Using the wrong compression class can have a negative impact on care. For example, using too low a class of garment can result in a failure to heal or to reduce swelling, while too high a class may be too uncomfortable for some patients.

As a wearer, be sure to ask the advice of your clinician so you can find the most effective garment for your condition, that is also acceptable to you and comfortable to wear.'

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Easy exercises for home or work: every little helps!

When it comes to improving your mobility, even the smallest amount of activity can help. Here are some exercises that you can do in the comfort of your home or office to improve your movement in a few easy steps.

- For these exercises, you can be seated, or standing. If sitting, you should be able to sit with your feet flat on the floor and knees bent at right angles.
- Avoid chairs with arms, as these will restrict your movement. If your chair has wheels, be careful, and ideally lock them if possible.
- If you are not used to exercising, build up slowly and aim to gradually increase the repetitions of each exercise over time. Try to do these exercises at least twice a week.

Shoulder stretch

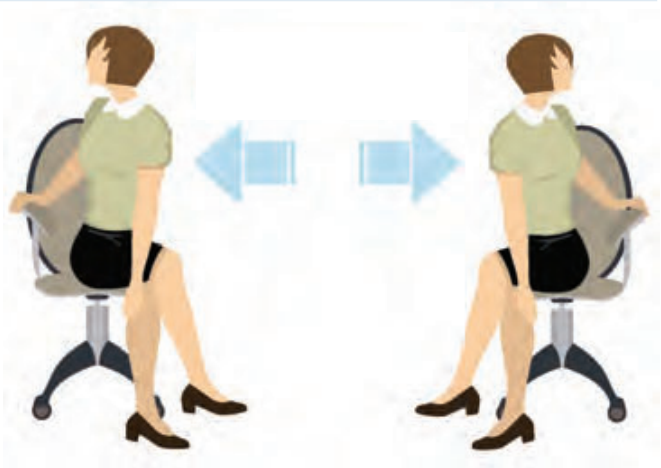
This stretch is good for posture.

1. Stand upright and place your left hand on your left shoulder.
2. While looking to your right, stretch your right arm across to the left side of your body.
3. Hold for 5 to 10 seconds and repeat 5 times. Then repeat steps 1, 2 and 3 for the other arm.

Back stretch

This stretch will aid flexibility in the back.

1. Sit upright with your feet flat on the floor.
2. Without moving your hips, turn your upper body to the left as far as is comfortable. Hold for 5 seconds.
3. Repeat on the right side. Do 5 times on each side.



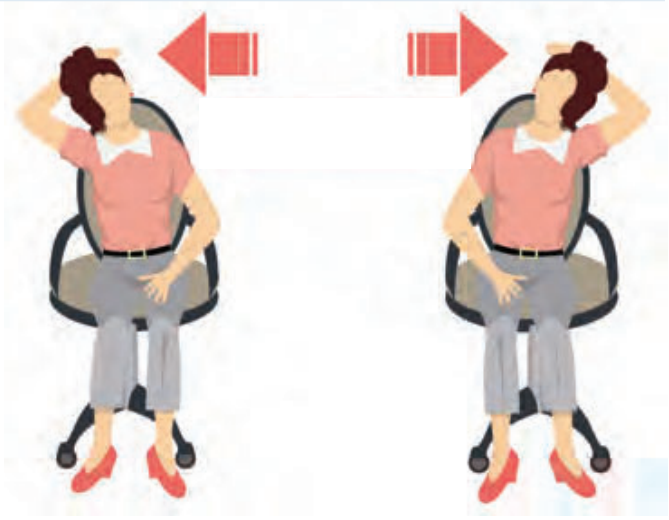
Leg lift

1. Sit upright and do not lean on the back of the chair. Hold on to the sides of the chair.
2. Lift your left leg with your knee bent as far as is comfortable. Place your foot down with control.
3. Repeat with the opposite leg.
4. Do 5 lifts with each leg. If you are able, you may wish to do both legs at the same time.

Neck stretch

This stretch helps to loosen tight neck muscles.

1. Sitting upright, look straight ahead and hold your left shoulder down
2. Slowly tilt your head to the right while relaxing your shoulder down. You can place your hand on your head to deepen the stretch, but do not pull or force the movement.
3. Repeat on the opposite side.
4. Hold each stretch for 5 seconds and repeat 3 times on each side.



Ankle stretch

This stretch will improve ankle flexibility and lower the risk of developing a clot.

1. Sit upright, hold on to the side of the chair and straighten your left leg with your foot off the floor.
2. With your leg straight and raised, point your toes away from you.
3. Point your toes back towards you.
4. Try two sets of 5 stretches with each foot. Raise your arms and breathe in as you lower them.
5. Repeat 5 times.

Further information

For free fitness ideas

https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/free-fitness-ideas/

For 10 minute workouts

https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/10-minute-workouts/

For fitness videos

https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/

Why it's time to stop smoking for good

When you make the decision to stop smoking, there are some immediate benefits to your health and some that are more long-term. There is no doubt, however, that quitting is good for your health!

After 20 minutes:

Your pulse rate returns to normal.

After 8 hours:

Nicotine and carbon monoxide in your blood reduces by more than half and oxygen levels return to normal.

After 48 hours:

Carbon monoxide is eliminated from your body. Your lungs start to clear out mucus and other smoking debris. There is no longer any nicotine left in the body. Your ability to taste and smell is improved.

After 72 hours:

Your breathing becomes easier. The bronchial tubes in your lungs begin to relax and your energy levels will increase.

After 2–12 weeks:

Your circulation improves.

After 3–9 months:

Coughs, wheezing and breathing problems improve as lung function increases by up to 10%.

After 1 year:

Your risk of heart disease is about half compared with a person who is still smoking.

After 10 years:

Your risk of lung cancer falls to half that of a smoker.

After 15 years:

Risk of heart attack falls to the same as someone who has never smoked.

Source: www.nhs.uk