



Be your own skin inspector!

Carrying out your regular skin care routine provides the perfect opportunity to visually inspect your skin. Take the time to know what your skin normally looks like so when problems arise you spot them quickly.

When cleansing and moisturising your skin, it is a good time to examine your skin for any changes in appearance that might indicate a problem. The sooner any changes are identified, the sooner help and advice can be sought

from your healthcare professional. It is important to do this, to prevent any problems from getting worse. Here we list some of the common issues encountered by people who wear compression, explain what they mean and what action to take.





Swelling

Look for any swelling of the legs and toes that is unusual for you. You may experience a normal degree of swelling after a long day or with hot weather, but swelling that is different to what you normally experience could point to a problem. If the swelling is above or below your compression garment, it may mean that a new garment is needed as it is not working effectively.

Swelling in one leg that is accompanied by pain, heat, redness and feeling unwell can indicate cellulitis, an infection of the skin (see p.14-15 for more information on cellulitis). This needs prompt treatment with antibiotics so contact your clinician immediately.

Any new swelling of the skin around an ulcer should be monitored, as it can be a sign of infection, especially if it is accompanied by a green or unpleasant wound discharge or odour and pain. Some or all of these symptoms may be present in wound infection so it is important to know what is normal for you, and to be vigilant for any changes.

Redness

Redness of the skin, especially if accompanied with swelling, pain and generally feeling unwell can also indicate cellulitis, especially if the redness is present on one limb, and spreads quickly. Cellulitis needs to be treated with antibiotics so you should seek medical advice.

Redness on both legs may indicate venous eczema, and is not usually

accompanied by feeling generally unwell. Venous eczema is usually managed with compression, but ask your healthcare professional for advice.

Pressure damage

Red skin accompanied by pain when wearing your garment can be caused by pressure and may suggest your garment does not fit well. If it is too large it can roll, causing areas of high pressure that damage the skin. Conversely, if it is too small, it will dig in causing skin damage and restricting blood flow. This is likely to be accompanied by pain, pins and needles and/or numbness that resolves when you remove your garment. If you experience these symptoms, do not reapply your garment and ask your clinician for a new fitting as soon as possible to ensure you can continue your treatment.

Cuts, bites and breaks

Any cuts, scratches or insect bites can act as an entry point for micro-organisms, which can result in infection. If you notice any new cuts, treat with a topical antiseptic, and apply a dressing. Be sure to inspect for cracks between your toes as Athlete's foot is a common infection in people with chronic oedema.

Wet, leaking legs

Leakage of lymph fluid through the skin is known as lymphorrhoea, and indicates an underlying problem with the lymphatic system. The wetness can make the skin white and boggy, or red and sore. In this state the skin is vulnerable to damage and infection. In most cases lymphorrhoea is managed using compression therapy. 

