



# Why you need to keep wearing your compression

Compression therapy is key to managing venous and lymphatic conditions. To be successful in the long term, it helps to understand why wearing compression is important, and what choices are available, so you can find the right solution for you.

**T**he management of a venous leg ulcer focuses upon healing the wound by using wound dressings and compression therapy, in addition to addressing any factors such as lifestyle choices that may also delay healing.

Compression is the most important part of care since it works by addressing the underlying cause of the ulcer — problems with the venous and lymphatic system, which if left untreated, result in

ulceration. Compression works by providing resistance to the muscles in the limb, helping to squeeze blood within the vessels, helping to clear congestion in the tissues.

## What compression is best for me?

There are different ways of applying compression; hosiery kits, wraps and bandaging are some of the options available. Which product is used is influenced by factors such as the size of your

ulcer, if swelling is also present, the overall shape and size of your limb, what you prefer to wear and what your clinician recommends to manage your condition.

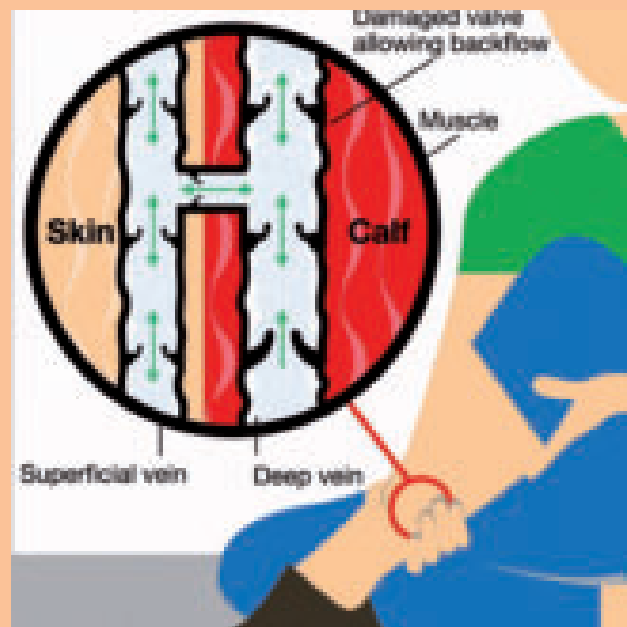




## What causes venous leg ulcers?

Venous leg ulcers arise when the valves in the veins of the legs are not working properly and struggle to prevent the backflow of blood in the legs as it is returning to the heart. This means that some of the blood pools in the lower leg causing problems such as skin changes, swelling and eventually, ulceration.

You will know that your ulcer is venous as your healthcare professional should have carried out a thorough assessment to establish this.



To work properly, compression therapy relies on your leg shape being thinner at the ankle and wider at the knee. If your limb is swollen or if your wound needs a bulky dressing, this shape is lost, so a compression garment may not work correctly. If this is the case, you may need to wear bandaging for a short time so that padding can be used to restore the shape of your limb, to ensure your compression therapy works.

However, it is well recognised that compression bandaging can be bulky, hot, and uncomfortable, as well as inconvenient as normal clothing and footwear may no longer fit. It can affect your ability to bath and shower, and care for your limb. If you need bandaging, it is important to remember this phase of treatment does not need to be forever.

Once your wound has reduced in size and is producing less exudate, and any swelling has reduced, you can discuss other compression options with your healthcare professional.

Compression hosiery kits have been shown to be as effective as bandaging in healing venous leg ulcers and reducing the rate of recurrence in a recent trial. This means they can be used as an alternative for some people with a venous leg ulcer (if the limb is the right shape, and the wound not too big). They can be applied and removed by the wearer or carer, helping the wearer to self care without nurse visits needed for bandage application. Normal footwear can be used too. Hosiery kits are also ideal for preventing the recurrence of ulceration once your leg ulcer has healed. They are not suitable were the limb is swollen




and still reducing in size; this means the hosiery will become too big as limb volume reduces.

Compression wrap systems are also available that enable self-application. They have the benefit of being adaptable as limb volume reduces, making them an option for cylindrical shaped limbs with swelling that is reducing. See p.20 for more information on the advantages of compression wrap systems.

Whatever compression garment you wear, it should be worn as directed by your healthcare professional. Garments are usually worn during the day to aid venous return as you go about your daily activities.

While compression addresses the underlying cause of your venous ulcer, it is important that your wound and surrounding skin is also cared for to improve the chance of healing (see p.8–13 for detailed information on how to do this).

Once healed, continue to take care of your skin and keep it healthy by cleansing and moisturising.

Wearing a compression garment post-healing has been shown to prevent recurrence, while people who do not wear compression following healing have been shown to be at very high risk of their ulcer coming back. With this in mind, it is important to keep on wearing your compression to keep your legs healthy. 

### **Don't give up on compression!**

In a study<sup>1</sup> of over 3000 patients who were prescribed compression hosiery for venous leg ulceration, treatment failure was often caused by non-wearing of compression. Reasons given for discontinuing with treatment were 'cutting off the circulation' and being 'too hot' to wear.

Another study<sup>2</sup> showed that failure to wear compression was related to pain, discomfort and difficulties with putting the compression on.

If you feel that discomfort or pain are stopping you from wearing your garment every day, speak to your healthcare professional about pain management, and alternative garment choices. Work together to find a solution that you are happy with. It may mean trying a variety of products but will be worth it once you find a solution you are happy with.

<sup>1</sup>. Raju et al (2007) *Ann Vasc Surg* 21(6): 790–5; <sup>2</sup>. Chung and Davies (2014) *CMAJ JAMC* 186(10): E391–8