

# How can I help my leg ulcer heal?



## Introduction

This leaflet is for patients who have a venous leg ulcer. It gives you information about what you can do to help your leg ulcer heal.

You will be given a lot of information about wearing compression bandages or stockings and doing exercises. Your health care professional will have discussed options with you as it is important that you are involved in decisions that affect you.

There are a lot of things that you can do to help your ulcer heal and make you feel better while this is happening.

## Wear your compression bandages or stockings

You have a problem with the circulation of blood in your veins; when the blood flows down it can cause your ankles to swell. Wearing compression bandages or stockings keeps the blood moving efficiently and helps to reduce the swelling in your ankles; this is why you are asked to wear them all the time.

## Do your exercises

Put your hand on the back of your calf and move your foot up and down. You will feel that muscle move and it is this movement that helps to keep the blood flowing in your legs. This happens when you walk but some people are not able to do this, and most people need to do a little more exercise.

The exercises are simple. You move your feet up and down and rotate your ankle. It is good to do this a few times every hour, especially if you have been sitting down for a while.

You may have been given a leaflet explaining exercise in more detail; if not please ask your health care professional prescribing your care for a copy.

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**Put your feet up**

Your ankles swell because of the slow blood flow. You will find that your ankles are less swollen when you have been in bed and it gets worse when you are sitting or standing. If you put your feet up so that they are higher than your hips the swelling should be reduced.

Some people put their feet on the arm of the sofa when they are sitting down. Alternatively you could put a cushion on a coffee table or footstool to rest your feet on. It does not matter as long as your feet are higher than your hips.

If you have stiffness in your hips, it may be uncomfortable to sit with your feet up. It may be better to lie on the bed with a couple of pillows or cushions under your ankles.

It is helpful to get into a routine for your rest time, perhaps when there is something you enjoy on the radio or television. It is best to have your feet up at least three times a day. When you do not have your feet up remember to do your exercises; however it is important to both.

**Eat a healthy diet**

As your ulcer heals, it uses a lot of goodness from the food you eat. It is important that your diet contains proteins, vitamins and minerals. These are found in a varied diet of meat, fish, eggs and cheese as well as fruit and vegetables. Please ask your health care professional for information on healthy eating.

It is important to watch your weight. If you are overweight you are putting an extra load on the veins in your legs.

**Drink plenty**

It is important to drink plenty of fluid during the day unless you have been told not to by your doctor. This helps your ulcer to heal and helps to keep your skin healthy. Do not worry that this will add to the swelling in your ankles as the fluid there is different.

Water is the best drink. You can have other drinks but be careful not to have too many caffeine drinks or those high in sugar.

**Skin care**

The skin on your leg is very delicate. You may already apply cream to your face and you need to look after your legs just as carefully. If you are wearing compression bandages or stockings your health care professional will advise you on skin care.

You should only use very gentle products on your skin. Avoid using anything with lanolin (wool fat) or perfume; some baby products contain these.

**Keep in touch**

When you have an ulcer you will see your health care professional often. When the ulcer has healed it is still a good idea to see your health care professional from time to time.

If you are worried about your legs, it is important to tell the nurse as soon as possible. You may get problems such as a sore spot, itching or swelling. It is easier to sort problems out if they are found early.

## **Do other things**

You may feel uncomfortable and as though your ulcer is taking over your life. Try to do other things that you enjoy and discuss your worries with your health care professional.

It is important to get the ulcer healed as quickly as possible and to deal with any pain, discomfort or practical difficulties along the way. This is much easier to do if you and your health care professional work together.

## **Can I find out more?**

You can find out more from the following website:

NHS Choices

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Leg-ulcer-venous/Pages/Treatment.aspx>

## **Safeguarding**

Wiltshire Health and Care has a strong commitment to care that is safe, of a high quality and that upholds our patients' rights. All our patients have the right to live lives free from abuse or neglect and, where they are able, to make or be supported to make informed decisions and choices about their treatment, care and support. Where patients are not able to make their own decisions, Wiltshire Health and Care staff are committed to ensuring that treatment, care and support is undertaken in accordance with the person's best interests. In order to fulfil these commitments, Wiltshire Health and Care follow the Safeguarding principles and responsibilities laid out in Sections 42-46 of the Care Act (2014) and are informed by, and apply, the guiding principles and provisions of the Mental Capacity Act (2005).

If you or your carer have any concerns about abuse, neglect or your rights in relation to care provided by Wiltshire Health and Care or any other agency or individual, please raise this directly with any Wiltshire Health and Care staff or contact the Safeguarding Adults Team by telephone on: 0300 4560111.

Regarding children, WHC is responsible for providing services in accordance with Section 11 of the Children's Act (1989) and works under the principles of Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018).

## **Wiltshire Health and Care Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

If you have any questions, or concerns, suggestions or compliments about our service, please speak to a member of staff.

This information sheet is available in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 0300 1237797 and [PALS.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net](mailto:PALS.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net)