



York and Scarborough
Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Managing your Venous Leg Ulcers

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

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York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE

Telephone: 01904 726629

Dermatology Department Scarborough

Scarborough Hospital, Woodlands Drive,

Scarborough, YO12 6QL

Telephone: 01723 342492

Outpatient Department Selby

The New Selby War Memorial Hospital,

Doncaster Road, Selby, YO8 9BX

Telephone: 01904 724296

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Introduction

A leg ulcer is a long-lasting (chronic) sore that takes more than two weeks to heal. Leg ulcers are a common problem. They affect a quarter of a million of people in Great Britain.

There are many different types of leg ulcers. The symptoms of a venous leg ulcer include pain, itching and swelling in the affected leg. There may also be discolouration or hardened skin around the ulcer, and the ulcer may produce a foul-smelling discharge.

A venous leg ulcer is an open wound in the lower leg due to high pressure in the veins.

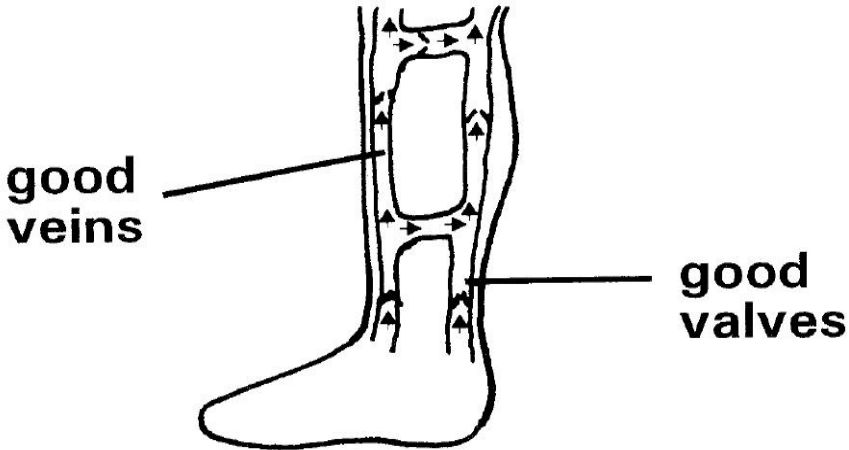
What causes a venous ulcer?

A venous leg ulcer can develop after a minor injury if there is a problem with the circulation of blood in the veins in your legs. This happens when the pressure inside the veins increases.

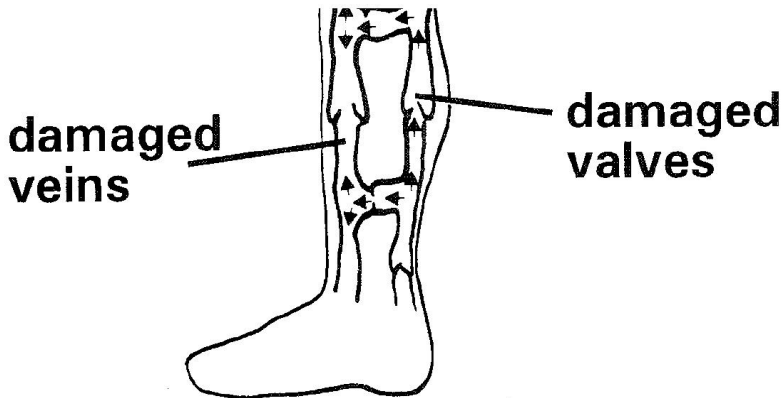
The constant high pressure can gradually damage the tiny blood vessels in your skin and make it fragile. As a result of this your skin can easily break and form an ulcer after a knock or scratch.

A venous ulcer is caused by damage to the veins in your legs. This affects the blood supply in your legs.

Veins take the blood back to your heart. In your legs the blood flows upward towards your heart. Every time the calf muscles in your leg move, they squeeze and pump the blood upwards. To prevent the blood flowing backwards, there are one-way valves in your veins.



Over the years your veins and valves have been damaged. They are no longer able to do their job correctly.



What caused them to become damaged?

There are a number of possibilities:

- Previous thrombosis (clot) in the leg veins
- Being overweight
- Standing still for long periods of time
- Pregnancy
- Smoking

How can I help?

Wearing compression bandages whilst your ulcer is healing will help your recovery. However, it is also important that when your ulcer is healed you understand that wearing support stockings long term will help prevent the ulcer recurring. This will be explained and discussed with you by the nurse and doctor.

How long will it take to heal?

The healing of the ulcer can take time, and it depends other factors such as:

- How long have you had the ulcer
- How big or deep the ulcer is
- Evidence of other medical problems
- Infection
- Life style

In this leaflet we give you some advice on do's and don'ts

Prevention of another ulcer is easier than the cure.

Please follow this advice as much as you can to assist your ulcer to heal.

- **Do** wear your bandages as advised until your ulcer is healed. They give your legs the necessary support. This helps your veins and valves to function better, and helps to return the blood to your heart. They also help to reduce the swelling in your legs.
- When healed, carry on with the advice. Remember to wear your support stockings.
- Once healed: **do** wear your support stockings.
- **Do** put them on before you get out of bed on a morning.
- **Do** regular exercise, if you are able.
- We also suggest exercising your leg muscles as recommended by the doctor. However, if you are unable, please do not attempt this.

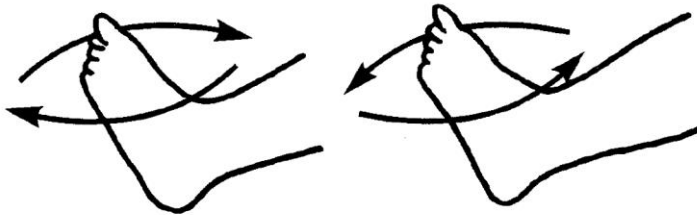
Suggested exercises for leg muscles

Consider doing them whilst watching TV

Slowly point foot towards floor. Then bring it back as far as it will go. **Repeat 10 times.**



Slowly make circular movements. First clockwise, then anti-clockwise. **Repeat 10 times.**



DO remember if you need to stop and rest, do so.

Exercise by walking or as shown above only helps if you have your compression bandages or support stockings on. (These foot exercises should only be carried out if you are active and mobile).

- **Do** try and lose weight if you are overweight, as being overweight puts strain on your veins in your legs.

- **Do** try and have daily fresh fruit containing vitamin C. Best sources are oranges, pure orange juice or blackcurrant drink e.g. Ribena.
- **Do** inform us if you experience any pain or discomfort with your compression bandage or stockings. Remove them if the pain is really extreme or your toes turn blue or numb.
- **Do** rest with your feet up; if advised by your doctor raise your leg so it is above the level of your heart. This helps the blood flow in your legs, improves healing and reduces any swelling.
- **Do** have a bath or shower. The nurse will discuss this with you.
- **Do** keep your skin moisturised.
- **Do** try and eat a healthy and well-balanced diet.

Important points

- **Don't** stand or sit for long periods of time without moving your legs.
- **Don't** allow your legs to press against the edge of a chair whilst you are sitting. This may affect the blood flow to your legs and potentially cause damage to your legs.
- **Don't** wear tight sock garters, socks or girdles as this may restrict your blood flow to your legs.
- **Don't** cross your legs as it restricts the blood flow in the legs.
- **Don't** warm your legs directly in front of the fire.
- **Don't** smoke; stopping can benefit your circulation.

Further contacts:

If you have any questions or concerns about venous leg ulcers you can phone us during the clinic opening times, which are as follows: -

York Clinic

Telephone: 01904 726621

Monday to Friday

Scarborough Clinic

Telephone: 01723 342492

Monday, Wednesday and Friday

Selby Clinic

Telephone: 01904 724296

Monday to Friday

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

Katy Maskell, Sister, Dermatology Department, York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or telephone 01904 726621.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website:

www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/

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