

Venous Disorders of the Lower Leg



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I have been told I have problems with my venous circulation

Veins

Veins collect used blood and carry it upwards back to the heart. They rely mainly on movement of your legs. When the muscles move they squeeze the veins and push the blood upwards. Small valves inside the veins stop the blood flowing back down again. Different things may affect the ability of the veins to move blood in the right direction:

- The valves may have been damaged by a thrombosis (blood clot commonly referred to as DVT).
- During pregnancy the valves can become damaged.
- Long periods of standing or sitting without moving your legs allows the pressure in the veins to rise. If this pressure rises significantly the valves cannot hold this pressure and start to leak.
- Being overweight can also cause damage to the valves.

What happens when the veins are not able to transport blood flow properly?

Blood is not able to flow properly when there is congestion in the veins, causing veins and ankles to swell. Swollen veins allow red cells to leak out under the skin in your legs which will appear as dark patches. The skin on your legs may become red and itchy.

Why do I have a venous ulcer?

This problem happens over a long time and you might have noticed that you had swollen veins in your leg and perhaps some varicose veins. Congestion in the veins means that the arteries are not able to bring in so much healthy blood which can mean skin becomes more delicate and easily damaged.

The congestion makes the skin very fragile and a knock or scratch can take a long time to heal, sometimes more than 4-6 weeks – we call this a venous ulcer.

Preventing damage

To help prevent damage to your skin it is important to reduce the congestion in your veins. This is best done by using compression hosiery but you need to be assessed for these by your nurse or doctor. Sometimes if the swelling is bad this may be reduced first by bandages before the hosiery are fitted.



Other important aspects to consider are:

- Exercise
- Healthy lifestyle and nutrition
- Watch your weight
- Good bed rest at night and avoid sleeping in a chair
- Skin care

Why do my ankles swell?

The congestion in your leg causes extra fluid to build up in your ankles. This gets worse if you stand for a long time because the blood flow slows down. If the swelling is not treated it can make the situation worse. Treatment is often a combination of medicine, bandages and exercise. It is important to put your feet up when you are sitting down and to get a good rest in bed at night.

Why is the skin on my legs so dry?

The congestion of blood in your leg and the extra fluid which builds up stretches your skin which makes it more delicate. The congestion also makes it difficult for new fresh blood to get to your leg as it used to. This means that natural moisturisers are not produced to keep the skin supple and healthy. The skin becomes dry and flaky, and it may itch a little. It is important to protect the skin and not to scratch. Your nurse will advise you on how to wash your leg and which moisturiser to use. You need to use products that will not irritate the skin and report any problems with your skin as soon as they happen.

In many cases a venous ulcer will heal within three months. If the ulcer is very large or if there are problems with the other types of blood vessels it may take longer. The important thing is to discuss your care with the nurse and to wear the bandages which are prescribed for you. The bandages are a very important part of your treatment as they will help to speed up the flow of blood in your veins.

If you would like this factsheet in another language or format, for example Braille, large print or audio, please call:

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