

## Caring for your leg ulcer: Compression therapy

### What is a venous leg ulcer?

Venous leg ulcers, also called venous stasis ulcers, are wounds that can develop on the lower legs of people who have poor circulation. This can be caused by “valves” in the veins not working properly which allows blood to “pool” in the lower leg.

Venous leg ulcers can happen in both men and women, and they make up about 80% of all leg ulcers.

### What is compression therapy?

Compression therapy is a way to treat and prevent venous leg ulcers. It helps muscles squeeze and push blood back through a person’s veins and legs, taking fluid with it.

If you have been diagnosed with venous insufficiency and/or a venous leg ulcer you may be asked to wear **compression bandages** as part of your treatment plan. Once your ulcer has healed, you will likely be asked to wear **compression stockings**. Both compression bandages and compression stockings are types of compression therapy.

When you have a venous leg ulcer, compression bandages should help your wound to heal. Compression stockings prevent more ulcers from developing.



### How will my health care team help me with my compression therapy?

Different health care providers may be involved in your care. This care begins with an assessment of your overall health and will include a simple test called a *Doppler ultrasound*, which will test the blood flow to your legs and feet. Based on your personal health history, additional tests may be needed.

Compression bandages will be prescribed and applied by a physician or nurse trained in compression bandaging.

The type of compression bandage and how often the bandage is changed will be determined to suit your specific needs, and can change as your venous ulcer heals.

Your doctor or nurse can teach you or a helper to properly apply your compression bandages or stockings.



### Is there anything I need to watch for and/or tell my doctor or nurse?

Your bandages will probably feel snug for the first couple of weeks.

If you experience any of the following, your compression bandages should be removed **immediately**:

- Pain in your leg, feet or toes that wasn't there before you started compression
- Numbness or tingling in your toes (like pins and needles) that wasn't there before your compression started
- A change in the colour of your toes
- If your bandages slip down your leg. This can cut off circulation and cause damage to your legs and/or feet.

### What happens when my ulcer is healed?

Once your venous ulcer has closed, you will probably need to wear compression stockings for the rest of your life to prevent more ulcers.

Ensure you get your stockings BEFORE your compression bandages are no longer needed so the swelling in your legs does not return. Your nurse or doctor can advise you on when it is time to be fitted for stockings.

Stockings should be replaced every 3-6 months to make sure they continue to work correctly. Your stocking should be hand washed in mild detergent and hung to dry. There are special devices to help you put on your stockings, if you have difficulty.

*References:*

Registered Nurses Association of Ontario: [Taking care of your legs](#)

Capital Health: [Venous leg ulcers](#)