



Venous Ulcer

Overview

Venous leg ulcers are one of the most common type of wounds occurring in the lower limb below the knee. A venous ulcer occurs due to fluid retention in the legs. This fluid damages tissue, potentially resulting in a venous ulcer. Venous ulcers can be quite painful, are difficult to heal and can often be recurring.

Early intervention and proper treatment is essential to help prevent complications and increase your chances of healing.

Signs and Symptoms

You may be at risk for a venous ulcer if you have one or more of the following signs:

- Swollen ankles (the most common symptom)
- Heavy or aching feeling in your legs when you stand or sit for long periods of time
- Red spots or brownish discoloration on the skin around your ankles
- Skin over your legs becomes leathery, dry or scaly

Causes

Numerous disorders can contribute to the damage of your veins, including deep vein thrombosis, phlebitis, congestive heart failure, obesity, multiple pregnancies and muscle weakness secondary to paralysis or arthritis.

Any two of the following may increase your risk of developing a venous ulcer:

- Obesity
- Immobility
- Over 60 years old
- Varicose veins
- History of phlebitis or deep vein thrombosis (DVT)
- Malnutrition

Treatment and Care

After a thorough evaluation, which may include diagnostic testing, your provider will discuss a treatment plan with you. Treatments vary based on individuals, but may include:

- Special dressings to absorb drainage.
- Compression stockings, wraps, and/or a special pump to reduce swelling.
- Elevation of the legs above the level of the heart (to help decrease the swelling).
- Regular exercise, such as walking (to help improve your circulation). Consult your provider before starting an exercise routine.
- Your provider will also encourage you to eat a balanced, nutritious diet. Foods high in protein, vitamins, and minerals are important for healing and maintaining healthy skin.

If you notice any of the following symptoms, notify your provider immediately:

- You have a sudden increase in swelling, or notice that your dressing or stocking feels too tight
- You have a fever of 101 degrees F or higher
- You have an increase in leg pain
- You notice an increase in drainage or a foul odor from the ulcer site

Preventative Measures

- Elevate your legs above the level of the heart for 30 minutes every 4 hours.
- Don't stand or sit with your legs down for more than an hour.
- Examine your legs carefully each day and observe for skin changes.
- Exercise your ankles while in bed (draw letters of alphabet with toes).
- Wear your compression stockings as directed by your physician. Put them on every morning to prevent swelling. Do not wear after your legs become swollen - you can cause harm if they become too tight (elevate your legs until swelling is reduced).
- If you are overweight, lose those extra pounds (under a physician's direction).
- Put two pillows under the mattress at the foot of the bed to keep the extremities elevated at night.
- Use unscented lotion to moisturize the legs and keep the skin healthy.

The Three “E”s to Control Swelling

Some people find the following an easy way to remember the basics:

Exercise: To increase blood flow back to the heart to promote better circulation.



Elevation: To increase blood flow to the heart (legs should be above heart).



Elastic Compression: To squeeze the leg veins which helps prevent blood from pooling.



FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL:

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