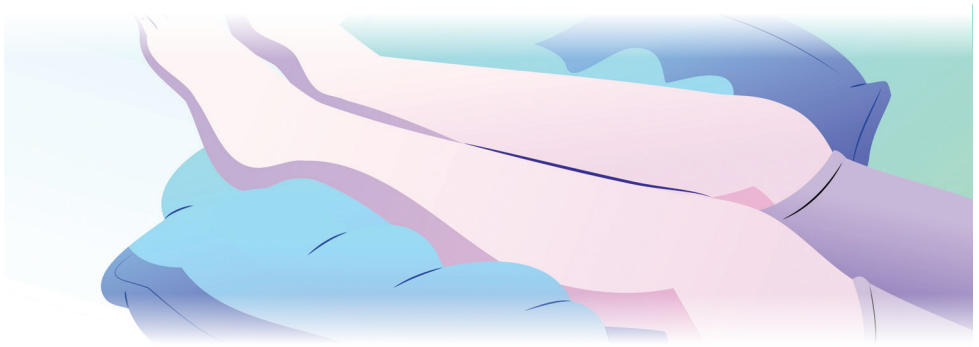


How do I care for my venous leg ulcer?

Looking after your venous leg ulcer is a long-term commitment to maintain your leg health. Following these key steps of care will get the best results for you and your legs, now and even when healed.



Every person with a venous leg ulcer is individual and while your care will be tailored to you, there are some key foundations of care that always apply, some of them even after you have healed. This is because they address the underlying problems caused by venous disease that are described in more detail on pages 6–7. The key components are: compression therapy, elevation and exercise, and skin and wound care.

Compression therapy

Compression therapy is really important as it improves the return of the blood in your legs and feet. It does this by forming a casing around your limb and applies pressure, which forces fluid from the skin

back into the blood, and helps the leg and foot muscles to squeeze the veins on movement, sending blood back to the heart. As a result, compression therapy is very effective at healing or preventing venous leg ulcers. Compression therapy also reduces the inflammation around the wound, reducing pain.

Compression therapy can be applied in several ways, e.g. using bandages, hosiery or wraps. You can read more about this on pages 14–15.

Elevation and exercise

You can help your body to move blood and fluid from your legs back to your heart by exercising more, and elevating

your legs at rest. Exercise, especially when wearing compression, activates the calf and foot muscles and improves the flow of blood in the veins. Elevation uses gravity to help clear the blood from your leg veins and sends it back towards the heart. For these benefits try:

- To keep active by walking regularly if possible, especially in compression
- Avoid standing or sitting for long periods of time
- Put your feet up – elevate your legs above your heart (toes level with the nose)
- Moving your feet around in circles, then up and down when sitting. This helps blood circulate and get back to your heart.

Wound care

When managing your venous leg ulcer, you will need to use a dressing that is suitable for the conditions of your wound. For example, if there is a lot of fluid coming from it, a more absorbent dressing may be required. If you have a wound infection, an antimicrobial dressing may be needed. Your healthcare professional will advise on what dressing is best for you. For more information on wound care, see pages 12–13.

Skin care

There are a number of skin changes that can occur as a result of venous disease. The reasons for this are explained on pages 6–7. This makes skin care a crucial part of caring for your legs, and some tips on maintaining your skin health can be seen opposite. While carrying out your skin care, take the opportunity to check your legs

for any changes in colour, temperature and overall condition. You can take time to check the progress of your wound too.

In this together



Professor David Gray, Professor of Wound Healing, Birmingham City University, comments:

‘Compression therapy, skin and wound care, exercise and elevation are powerful tools to heal your venous leg ulcer and prevent its return.’

Tips on skin health

- Keep the skin clean and well moisturised
- Avoid soap and washing with hot water to prevent drying the skin out. Ideally use a soap substitute and warm water
- Pat the skin dry and avoid rubbing to prevent damage
- Apply moisturisers in a downward motion not against the hair growth to prevent irritation of the hair follicle
- Always moisturise after washing the skin and let it absorb before applying a new dressing or compression garment