

Managing a Healed Leg Ulcer

Leg ulcers are common and affect a significant proportion of the population. When your leg ulcer has healed, there are lots of things you can do to stop it recurring. The information in this leaflet will help.

Compression hosiery

You should wear fitted compression hosiery (special support stockings/ wraps) in order to stop your leg ulcer coming back. Your nurse will measure you for these stockings/ wraps.

It is important that you use the stockings as directed by your nurse. Put on your compression stockings first thing in the morning, immediately after getting up. Otherwise your ankles will swell quickly. Remove the stockings when you are going to bed.

You must wear your compression stockings every day and they should be free of creases or wrinkles. Do not fold the stocking down as this will apply pressure to your leg and may reduce blood flow.

Caring for compression hosiery

Follow the manufacturers' instructions when washing stockings in order to preserve the elasticity (compression). They should usually be hand washed **every day**, or washed in a delicate wash setting in your washing machine (40 degrees).

- Rinse stockings well several times. **Never use bleaching agents or softeners.**
- Hang to dry immediately - do not leave them lying moist or in a towel.
- Do not dry the stockings on radiators or in direct sunlight or put in a tumble dryer. This will affect the elasticity of the stockings.
- Stockings must be renewed every six months.

- 2 pairs of stockings can be availed, free of charge, by patients who have a medical card through PCRS in a calendar year on prescription from their nurse prescriber or GP.
- If you do not have a medical card these stocking can be purchased from your pharmacy as per your assessing nurses/ GP's directions.
- Application aids for stockings are available, including silk slipper and applicator frames. Your nurse can tell you about these.
- If your hosiery is uncomfortable or rolls down please contact your healthcare professional as alternative products are available.

Daily skin care

It is essential that you take good care of the skin on your legs, especially when you have had a leg ulcer.

- Remove your stockings when going to bed.
- Wash your legs with warm water and emulsifying ointment or emollient. Be careful as this ointment can make a bath or shower tray very slippery. **Always use a bath or shower mat.**
- Pat your legs dry. Dry in between the toes well.
- Apply emulsifying ointment or emollient to your legs in a downward motion. Avoid rubbing ointment against the direction of hair growth as this can cause little infections known as folliculitis.
- Take good care of your feet and toes, and check them daily. Ensure the stockings are not causing pressure damage to your toes or ankle crease.
- Keep your toenails clean and trim. Your nurse will advise if it is necessary for you to see a chiropodist or a podiatrist.
- Wear appropriate and well-fitting footwear.
- Avoid excessive heat or cold.

Smoking

If you smoke, consider stopping, or get support to help you stop. Smoking negatively affects wound healing. Smoking causes constriction/tightness in the blood vessels therefore reducing the flow of blood, oxygen and nutrition's to the wound. This interferes with the healing of the wound.

For smoking cessation advice contact HSE Quit Team on Free phone **1800 201 203** or visit <https://www2.hse.ie/living-well/quit-smoking/> for more details.

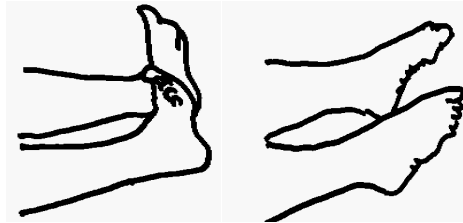
Exercise your feet

1. Clench (tense and release) your toes ten times.
2. Move your ankles up and down. Extend your toes away and then flex your ankle, pulling your toes towards you. Do this ten times.
3. Circle or rotate your ankle. Pretend your big toe is a pencil and try to 'draw' a circle in front of you. Circle anti-clockwise and then clockwise, ten times.
4. Stand up and hold on to the back of a chair for support. Rise up on your toes and then back down so that your feet are flat on the floor again. Do this ten times.
5. Lie down, and then bend and straighten your leg ten times. Press your knee back into the bed and hold for 10 seconds.
6. Walk as much as possible and avoid prolonged standing. Sit down whenever you can, such as when you are ironing, preparing meals, or waiting at the bus stop.

Leg exercises

Do each exercise ten times. Aim to repeat this four to five times each day.

1. Clench toes and relax. Move your ankles up and down by flexing your ankle towards you and then extending it away.



2. Lie down, and bend your knee. Then straighten your leg and press your knee back into the bed. Hold for ten seconds.
3. Stand and hold on to the back of a chair for support. Rise up on your toes and then back down with feet flat on the floor.
4. Circle or rotate ankle (pretend big toe is a pencil and try to 'draw' a circle) anti-clockwise and clockwise.



5. Walk as much as possible and avoid prolonged standing. Sit down whenever you can such as when ironing, preparing meals or waiting at the bus stop.

Watch your weight

Being overweight can make varicose veins worse. Regular exercise and a well-balanced eating plan will help control your weight, and prevent leg ulcers.

If you feel you need help with weight management please discuss this with your nurse or GP.

Remember

If you get a new ulcer or your old ulcer starts to come back, seek advice from your nurse or doctor immediately. Do not treat it yourself. The sooner you are get appropriate, professional treatment, the sooner you will heal.

You will attend Leg Ulcer and Wound Assessment Clinic every year or sooner depending on advice from your nurse, where you will have your circulation rechecked and be measured for compression hosiery.

Information

For more information on wound care please visit

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/2/primarycare/community-funded-schemes/wound-care/wound-care.html>