Venous Disorders of the Lower Leg Explained
Patient Information
I have been told I have problems with the venous circulation in my legs.

What does this mean?

Veins are blood vessels which transport blood from your feet back to the heart. The veins rely mainly on the movement of the leg muscles, which squeeze the veins and help push the blood flow upwards.

The veins contain small valves which help prevent the blood flowing backwards down the leg.

In venous disease the valves may not work properly resulting in backflow of the venous blood supply and a build-up of waste products and swelling in the lower limb, especially at the ankle.

If untreated this may result in discoloured, itchy, dry skin and leg ulceration.

What is a leg ulcer?

A leg ulcer is a wound on the leg which has not healed within 4-6 weeks. It may have occurred because of a knock, scratch or on some occasions, there is no obvious cause.
Why have I got venous circulation problems?

The valves may not work properly for a number of reasons, for example:

- Deep Vein Thrombosis, (DVT), a blood clot in a deep vein.
- Pregnancy
- Standing or sitting for long periods
- Being overweight
- Varicose veins
- Hereditary

What can be done to improve the venous blood flow?

After your assessment the nurse will advise you on your best treatment options.

To help prevent and repair any damage to your skin it is important to reduce the congestion in your veins.

This is achieved by using special compression bandages or support stockings.
How can I help my venous ulcer to heal?

1. **Wear your bandages or support hosiery** as advised by the nurse. This will improve your blood flow in the legs, reduce swelling and speed up your wound healing.

2. **Do your exercises.** Exercises will help your leg muscles work and so improve the blood flow in the leg. Your calf muscle plays a very important role in pushing the blood flow back up the veins in your legs. Your calf muscle will work naturally when you walk. When walking, ensure you are moving your ankle properly, ‘heel to toe’ walking is important i.e. put the heel on the ground first, following through to the ball of the foot. In addition to walking there are other exercises you can do, for example, move your entire foot up and down and rotate your ankle. Ensure you are moving the entire foot during the exercise and not just the toes. This should be done a few times every hour or two.

3. **Put your feet up.** Avoid standing or sitting with your feet on the floor for any significant length of time. When you put your feet up it also helps the blood flow up the leg. Your feet should be higher than your hips. It may be more comfortable to rest on top of the bed. Try to do this regularly to reduce the pressure on your veins.

4. **Eat a healthy diet and drink plenty of fluids** - (unless you have been told not to by another health professional). It is important that your diet contains proteins, vitamins and minerals. These can be found in a variety of foods such as meat, fish, eggs, cheese, fruit and vegetables.

5. **Take your medication.** You may have been given medication by your doctor to help reduce the swelling in your legs. This will help heal your ulcer along with the bandages and hosiery. It is also important to take adequate pain control, as this will help to make you comfortable and therefore help your wound to heal.
Skin Care

Skin care is very important to prevent damage to your already delicate skin. The aim of good skin care is to maintain healthy skin and reduce the risk of infection.

Skin Care Tips:

- Avoid using perfumed soaps and lotions. When cleansing pay particular attention to skin folds. Ensure skin and skin folds are dried properly.

- Always pay particular attention to washing and drying between your toes. Wet toes frequently result in infections such as athlete's foot and cellulitis.

- Wash skin daily with a soap substitute. This will help enhance absorption of your moisturiser.

- Apply moisturiser daily to help prevent the skin becoming dry and flaky. Always apply in a downward motion from knee to toe.

Keep in Touch

It is important you attend all appointments for renewal of dressings and reviews at the leg ulcer clinic.
Ankle exercises

Sitting & lying
(flexing the foot)

Sitting & lying
(rotating the ankle)

Standing
(moving up & down)
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