

Understanding compression stockings



Your health care professional has recommended that you have compression stockings to treat a leg ulcer. This leaflet gives you more information about what compression stockings are for, how you are measured for them and commonly asked questions about them.

What are compression stockings?

Your health care professional has prescribed compression stockings for you to help the problems you have due to damaged veins and leg ulcers. The stockings apply pressure to your leg to help your veins carry blood back to your heart.

Before prescribing compression stockings, your health care professional will assess you to make sure this is the right treatment. This assessment should have included checking your blood flow using a Doppler device. Please ask the health care professional providing your care if you are not sure if you have had this assessment.

What are the benefits of compression stockings?

Compression helps reduce swelling in your legs by helping your veins carry blood back to your heart. Compression stockings will help reduce the risk of an ulcer forming.

How will I be measured for the stockings?

There are a number of different manufacturers of compression stockings. Your health care professional will select the most appropriate stockings based on your requirements. The stockings most frequently used go just up to the knee; occasionally full leg stockings may be needed or preferred by you.

It is important that the right size is chosen. The health care professional prescribing or providing your stockings will measure your leg. Occasionally the size of the leg does not fall into the standard sizing categories; in this case we may need to take extra measurements so that made to measure stockings can be prescribed.

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Standard sizes can be supplied within a few days; supplies of made to measure stockings will take longer. You will be treated with compression bandages until the stockings are available.

Compression stockings are available in different strengths; for example Class 1, 2 or 3 and in 2-layer hosiery kits. The stockings are available in different colours and styles such as open or closed toe, stockings or ribbed socks, knee or full length. Your health care professional will discuss the options with you.

What if I have any problems?

If you experience any pins and needles in your feet, numbness, discolouration, reactions to the stockings or increased pain in your legs, you must remove the stockings and inform your health care professional or GP as soon as possible.

If you have any problems, ask your GP or health care professional for advice.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Do I need to wear my stockings all the time?

Your legs may swell when you are out of bed, the stockings will prevent this. If you have any problems with your legs swelling you must ask for advice from your GP or health care professional. It is important to wear compression stockings life-long to continue to reduce the risk of an ulcer forming.

Can I remove the stockings if I want to?

If you are able to take off your stockings you can do so, for example if you want to have a shower. If your stockings are for treatment of an ulcer your health care professional will give you advice regarding this.

What if I cannot take my stockings off?

It is safe to sleep in your stockings as long as it is comfortable. Your health care professional will give you advice regarding this.

What if I cannot get my stockings on?

Your nurse or health care professional will provide you with a stocking aid; this will help you put them on. Please ask your health care professional about this.

How often should my stockings be replaced?

It is important that your stockings continue to give you the right support; to ensure this you will need new stockings every 6 months. Your health care professional will invite you to have a repeat Doppler assessment to ensure adequate blood flow. You will also be re-measured for your stockings as your legs may have reduced or increased in size, therefore the stockings you have been wearing may not be as effective.

Best Practice Statement

HOSIERY APPLICATION AND REMOVAL

DO

- be careful applying and removing over areas of hard skin that can damage hosiery, or while wearing jewellery.
- ensure legs are dry before putting on hosiery, to protect skin and garment integrity. If the skin is fully intact and in good condition consider patting legs dry to absorb excess moisture.
- speak to your GP or health care professional if compression hosiery is not fitting well.
- follow the manufacturer's wash and care instructions. Note that some garments can be washed as normal at lower temperatures although labels suggest hand washing.
- air dry hosiery to maintain elasticity unless stated otherwise.
- contact your GP or health care professional if applying or removing compression hosiery is too difficult. They can prescribe an application aid.
- remove hosiery and inform your GP or health care professional if there is any numbness to the toes.
- see your GP immediately if the leg suddenly swells, there is redness or warmth of the skin, new numbness or tingling in the toes, fatigue in the leg or pain that may increase when standing or walking. These could be signs of a potentially life threatening blood clot or localised Cellulitis infection. If the swelling increases so that the hosiery does not fit, removal of the hosiery is necessary.

DO NOT

- roll or fold down compression stockings during wear; it hampers circulation and increases the risk of a blood clot.
- apply emollients just before applying hosiery, this can make them more difficult to apply.
- cut holes in the stockings or cut off the feet.
- buy extra pairs of compression hosiery off prescription.
- double layer compression hosiery unless advised to by your health care professional.
- wear compression hosiery that has been prescribed for someone else.
- keep old hosiery after new pairs have been prescribed; this avoids wearing overstretched or ill-fitting garments.

Safeguarding

Wiltshire Health and Care has a strong commitment to care that is safe, of a high quality and that upholds our patients' rights. All our patients have the right to live lives free from abuse or neglect and, where they are able, to make or be supported to make informed decisions and choices about their treatment, care and support. Where patients are not able to make their own decisions, Wiltshire Health and Care staff are committed to ensuring that treatment, care and support is undertaken in accordance with the person's best interests. In order to fulfil these commitments, Wiltshire Health and Care follow the Safeguarding principles and responsibilities laid out in Sections 42-46 of the Care Act (2014) and are informed by, and apply, the guiding principles and provisions of the Mental Capacity Act (2005).

If you or your carer have any concerns about abuse, neglect or your rights in relation to care provided by Wiltshire Health and Care or any other agency or individual, please raise this directly with any Wiltshire Health and Care staff or contact the Safeguarding Adults Team by telephone on: 0300 4560111.

Regarding children, WHC is responsible for providing services in accordance with Section 11 of the Children's Act (1989) and works under the principles of Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018).

Wiltshire Health and Care Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any questions, or concerns, suggestions or compliments about our service, please speak to a member of staff.

This information sheet is available in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 0300 1237797 and PALS.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net