

Venous Leg Ulcers

Information for Patient and Carers

What is a venous leg ulcer?

A venous leg ulcer is defined as an open skin break between the knee and ankle joint that occurs in the presence of venous disease, that takes more than two weeks to heal. (NICE, 2013)

What causes venous leg ulcers?

A venous leg ulcer can develop after a minor injury where there is a problem with the flow of blood through the veins of your leg. If this happens, the pressure inside the veins increases and this can gradually damage the tiny blood vessels in your skin and make it fragile. If you then knock or scratch your skin, it can easily break and form an ulcer. Unless you have treatment to improve the blood flow in the veins in your legs, the ulcer may take a long time to heal.

Who is most at risk?

A number of things can increase your risk of developing a venous leg ulcer, including:

- being overweight
- recurrent episodes of cellulitis (infection of the skin on your legs)
- smoking
- if you cannot move around very well
- sitting for a long period of time
- if you have had a deep vein thrombosis (DVT)
- if you have varicose veins
- if you have previously injured your leg
- previous surgery to your leg
- a history of self-injecting drugs into the veins of your legs
- some medical conditions such as diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, some skin conditions.

Lower Limb Assessment

The nurse will be able to diagnose a venous leg ulcer from your history and examining your affected leg. A photograph may be taken of your wound. The photograph is useful to record the progression of your ulcer and will be repeated regularly.

Your nurse will try to determine the cause of the ulcer by asking about any other health conditions you may have. They will ask whether you have any additional symptoms, such as swelling in your legs, feet or ankles and will monitor for discolouration or hardened skin. They will examine both your legs. They will also feel your pulse in your ankles and feet and may listen to them using a handheld machine – known as a Doppler.

What other tests might you need?

The Nursing team may carry out a test known as an Ankle Brachial Pressure Index (ABPI) test, also referred to as a Doppler. The test is painless and involves measuring the blood pressure in the arteries in your ankles and feet then comparing these to the blood pressure in your upper arms. These measurements are taken with an ultrasound probe, which uses sound waves to determine the flow of blood in your arteries.

The blood pressure in your arteries should be about the same in your arms as in your legs. If the blood pressure in your ankles is lower than that in your arms you may have a condition called, peripheral arterial disease.

Leg ulcers caused by peripheral arterial disease are treated differently from venous leg ulcers. If peripheral arterial disease is suspected from your symptoms and/or ABPI you will be referred to Vascular services for further consultation and possible further tests.

The doppler will be repeated between 3 – 12 monthly.

One of the main treatments used for venous ulcers is wearing compression therapy to support the veins in your legs. (*see separate leaflet – Compression Therapy*)

What do you need to observe?

Monitor for signs of infection or other problems:

- More wound leakage than usual
- More pain than usual
- Increasing redness around the wound
- An unusual smell
- Wound is getting bigger
- Feeling generally unwell

Contact your health care professional or NHS 111 if you are worried.

Become more involved in decisions about your healthcare. You may be asked to make choices about your treatment and advised on ways that you can participate in delivering your own care.

To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions:

1. What are my options?
2. What are the positives and negatives of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?

If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :

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Beechwood Health Centre
60B Keighley Road
Halifax
HX2 8AL

Telephone: 01422 652291

www.cht.nhs.uk

If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obraťte se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

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