

Venous Leg Ulcer

WHAT IS IT?

Venous disease, or poor blood flow from your legs back up to your heart, can result in a build-up of fluid in the legs, called edema, which can sometimes lead to changes in the skin and cause it to break down. This wound is known as a venous leg ulcer. Even a minor trauma—such as a knock on the coffee table—on a leg with venous disease can result in a wound. If the edema is not corrected, the leg ulcer may be difficult to heal.

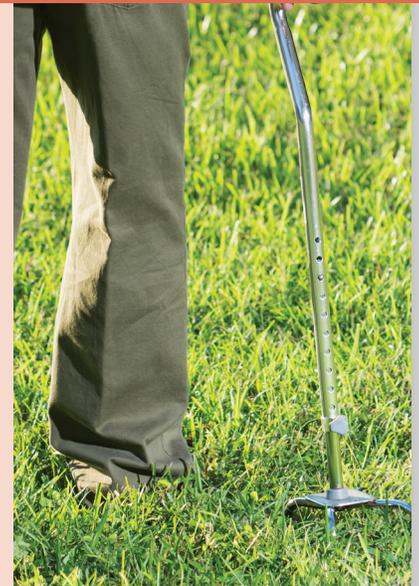


Blood flow from the lower leg back up to the heart is called venous blood return, and it uses something called the calf-muscle pump to move blood upward against gravity. Valves in the veins prevent the blood from flowing back down. Poor venous blood return occurs when either the valves or the calf-muscle pump are not working as well as they should. This causes swelling of the legs and if the skin is traumatized, it results in poor wound healing.

WHAT CAN I DO MYSELF (DIY)?

Exercise is important for working the calf-muscle pump and getting blood flowing back up your leg to the heart where it can get the oxygen it needs. You need to walk, dance, run or move your ankle (by pointing your toes and then bringing them up toward your nose) while watching TV or sitting at your desk. Avoid sitting or standing for long periods. Whatever you do, **get that calf-muscle pump working!**

There might be something else going on that you need to know: if the veins in your legs have valves that don't work properly, not all blood will be able to make it back up to your heart.



THE KEY RULE

Improve venous blood return to your heart by exercising your calf-muscle pump and through compression therapy provided by a health-care professional to support the valves in your veins.

Compression stockings that apply enough pressure to your legs to close the valves help the blood to flow back up to your heart and prevent swelling in the lower legs. Compression stockings may require a prescription and are available in health supply stores. The key to keeping the extra fluid out of your legs? Wear your compression stockings at all times except in bed.

WHEN DO I CALL IN A PRO?

You may not be aware that you are not moving your calf muscle enough to make the pump work properly and may need to seek the assistance of a physical therapist. As well, compression stockings need to be fitted to a leg when the swelling is reduced so you may need compression wraps applied to reduce the edema before being fitted. In any case, you need to talk to your health-care professional to make sure compression is right for you and then be professionally fitted. It is important to note that compression therapy should be used with caution or not at all if you have arterial disease.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Another set of free resources, called the [Care at Home series](#), may also be of interest to you, especially [Caring for Your Swollen Legs at Home: Preventing and Managing Venous Leg Ulcers](#).