Coping with a leg ulcer

Frequently asked questions

**What does a leg ulcer treatment do?**
It helps the blood in the leg flow properly towards the heart again.

**How does the treatment work?**
Layers of bandages are used to help the blood flow correctly in an upwards direction and stop it flowing backwards. There are no pills you can take to make your leg ulcer better as such.

**What are the advantages of using all these layers of bandages?**
They reduce swelling, helping the ulcer to heal.

**My skin is sore - what can I do to prevent the irritation?**
Above all - DON'T SCRATCH! See your nurse or doctor who will be able to tell you the cause of your problem and will give you the appropriate treatment.

**When and how can I wash my leg?**
When your leg ulcer is being dressed you should take the opportunity to wash your leg normally in tap water.

**My leg smells, what's wrong?**
Leg ulcers can give off an offensive smell; there are lots of reasons for this, including the leakage of fluid from the ulcer and even the leg ulcer dressing itself. Ask your nurse if this is a problem. Don't worry, your leg is not rotting and it doesn't have gangrene!

**My leg ulcer is very painful, what can be done to stop the pain?**
Unfortunately having a leg ulcer can be very painful. This isn't because of the bandages but because of all the nerve endings (normally covered up) that have become exposed. Ask your doctor if you are suffering from pain - there are lots of ways to relieve it and they will be able to advise and give you what is best for you. Taking pain killers regularly will help but follow the dosage instructions and do not wait until the ulcer is painful before taking them.

**How can I help control the pain?**
Pain may be eased by raising your legs whenever possible, eg whilst watching the TV or reading, as well as taking exercise in between. The pain should lessen as the ulcer heals but if it continues, ask your doctor or nurse.

**Since I've had a leg ulcer and been taking painkillers I have been suffering from constipation, what can I do about this?**
Constipation may be a side effect of the pain killers you are taking, your nurse can give you something to help with this.

**Sometimes my leg feels uncomfortable, do I really have to wear so many bandages?**
Yes! The four layers of bandaging are essential, they create just the right amount of pressure to make the treatment effective. They reduce swelling, helping the ulcer to heal.

**My bandages feel too tight/uncomfortable/painful, is there anything I can do?**
If you are experiencing an unusual tightness, pain or discomfort, do tell your nurse.

**Can anything be done to improve the bulky appearance of my bandages?**
The outer layer of the PROFORE® bandages has a pinkish tone to blend in with your legs and will look very unobtrusive once you have your tights/stockings on. Another alternative is to wear loose legged trousers whilst your ulcer is healing. The advantage of using this treatment is that it offers faster healing than other types of bandaging, so you won’t have to put up with it for so long!
Can I take my bandages off at nighttime?  
No, you must keep the bandages on all the time between visits from your nurse or going to your clinic.

How long do I have to keep the bandages on for?  
You must keep your bandages on until the nurse says your leg ulcer is properly healed.

Will I be able to wear my normal shoes over the bandages?  
Your bandages will pad down after a while but you may need to wear a larger size or adjustable fastening shoe to fit over them to begin with and it is always better for your circulation to wear sensible shoes that aren’t too tight.

How can I help to heal my leg ulcer?  
Leg ulcers may take a long time to heal - but they get better faster if you help yourself. There are lots of things you can do to help the healing process:
• See a chiropodist about every three months so they can take good care of your feet and nails.
• Wear sensible footwear
• Exercise your legs regularly to help get the calf muscle working, short walks are better than no walks at all!
• Do regular foot and ankle exercises.
• When resting, try to keep the level of your ankles above your heart.
• At night, raise the foot of your bed up by about 4 inches (10cm).
• Keep all appointments with your nurse or doctor.
• Phone your nurse or doctor about any problems or anxieties.
• If you are overweight, do try to lose a few pounds. Extra weight makes more work for those poor veins.
• Eat a healthy diet containing plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, fish and meat. You may be referred to a dietitian if you need further advice about this.
• Do not interfere with your bandages.
• Avoid standing in one position - shift weight from one foot to the other.

Can I stop treatment as soon as my ulcer has healed?  
No. Treatment of your leg does not stop when your ulcer heals, there are things you can do to help prevent your ulcer returning.

How can I stop my ulcer coming back?  
Compression stockings do improve the chances of the leg staying healed. As well as using a stocking, continue to raise your legs eg on a footstool when sitting during the day and don’t forget to exercise daily.

What should I do if I knock my leg or notice a break in the skin?  
Don’t despair but contact your nurse immediately.

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