

Leg Ulcers

Health Condition Factsheet

Released May 2019

What is it?

A leg ulcer is a wound on the leg or ankle. The wound is usually caused by damaged veins or veins not working properly. They can also occur due to blood clots, injuries or obesity. They are more common in older people with poor circulation.

Symptoms of leg ulcers are a rash that develops into a wound, as well as leg swelling and aching. Leg ulcers can be treated, and your GP will recommend the most suitable treatment approach.

What will my GP do now?

Your GP will diagnose the type of leg ulcer so it can be treated.

Your GP will also:

- Determine the underlying cause of your type of leg ulcer
- Discuss any factors or risks that may affect healing
- Give you advice to promote healing and prevent infection, including skincare and nutritional tips
- Talk to you about suitable exercises that help improve circulation
- Discuss medications and pain relief

Your GP will refer you for a simple test called an ankle brachial pressure index. This test helps to rule out arterial disease, which is a form of poor circulation, so you can know if compression therapy is a safe option for you. Some people with poor circulation shouldn't wear compression stockings.

If you have an arterial leg ulcer, you may need to see a specialist.

Surgery and walking programs can help to treat arterial leg ulcers.

If your leg ulcer is found to be a complication of your diabetes, also known as a diabetic neuropathic wound, you may need to see a specialist for treatment. Treatment involves air walkers and specially made shoes.

Lymphatic leg ulcers can be treated with massage, exercise, compression therapy and pain relief.

What will my GP do in the future?

Your GP will continue to monitor your leg ulcer and check it is healing well. You may need a specialist referral if your ulcer becomes infected. If your leg ulcer isn't healing well, your GP might perform more tests to exclude any underlying factors. If you need support or help at home, your GP can refer you to a community wound support service.

Your GP will give you strategies to prevent another leg ulcer from developing.

What can I do?

Follow your GP's instructions about proper skincare, which is essential for wound healing.

Clean your wound when you change the dressing, and keep the skin around the wound healthy and clean. Talk to your GP about a suitable moisturiser.

You can try and prevent a recurrence by using compression stockings, if it's safe to do so. Your GP will tell you if you cannot wear compression stockings

Staying mobile, and exercising your calf muscles regularly with a pump action, can also help to prevent leg ulcers. Keep your legs elevated above your heart when resting.

Leg ulcer risk factors

There are a number of factors that may increase the risk of having a leg ulcer

Age - circulation can become poorer with age

Varicose veins

Cigarette smoking

Arterial disease

Pressure sores - common in bed bound people

Certain health conditions such as diabetes and arthritis

Certain medications which can cause fluid build-up and swelling

Leg Ulcers



What questions should I ask my doctor?

- How was my leg ulcer formed?*
- What treatments are available?*
- How can I care for my wound?*
- How can I speed up healing?*
- What should I avoid?*
- Are compression stockings safe for me to wear?*
- Should I see a specialist?*
- Where can I learn more about leg ulcers?*



What supports are available?

Liverpool Hospital Wound Clinic

The clinic provides assessment and treatment of complex wounds requiring input from a specialist. Your GP will refer you if needed.

Community Wound Assessment Team

This local team of specialist nurses can help you to manage your wound at your local community health centre or home. Speak to your GP about a referral.

Where can I learn more?

If you'd like to learn more about leg ulcers, the following resources can help:

- **AIMED cellulitis** – importance of routine skin care: aimed.net.au
- **Patient.info** – venous leg ulcers: patient.info
- **Queensland Government - nutrition and wound healing**: health.qld.gov.au

This information is to be viewed by someone who has received a diagnosis from their doctor. It is not designed to be used to diagnose a condition or as a substitute for ongoing medical care

Health Resource Directory factsheets are endorsed by South Western Sydney PHN's Community Advisory Committee and local GPs

phn
SOUTH WESTERN
SYDNEY

An Australian Government Initiative