

Care of your compression garments

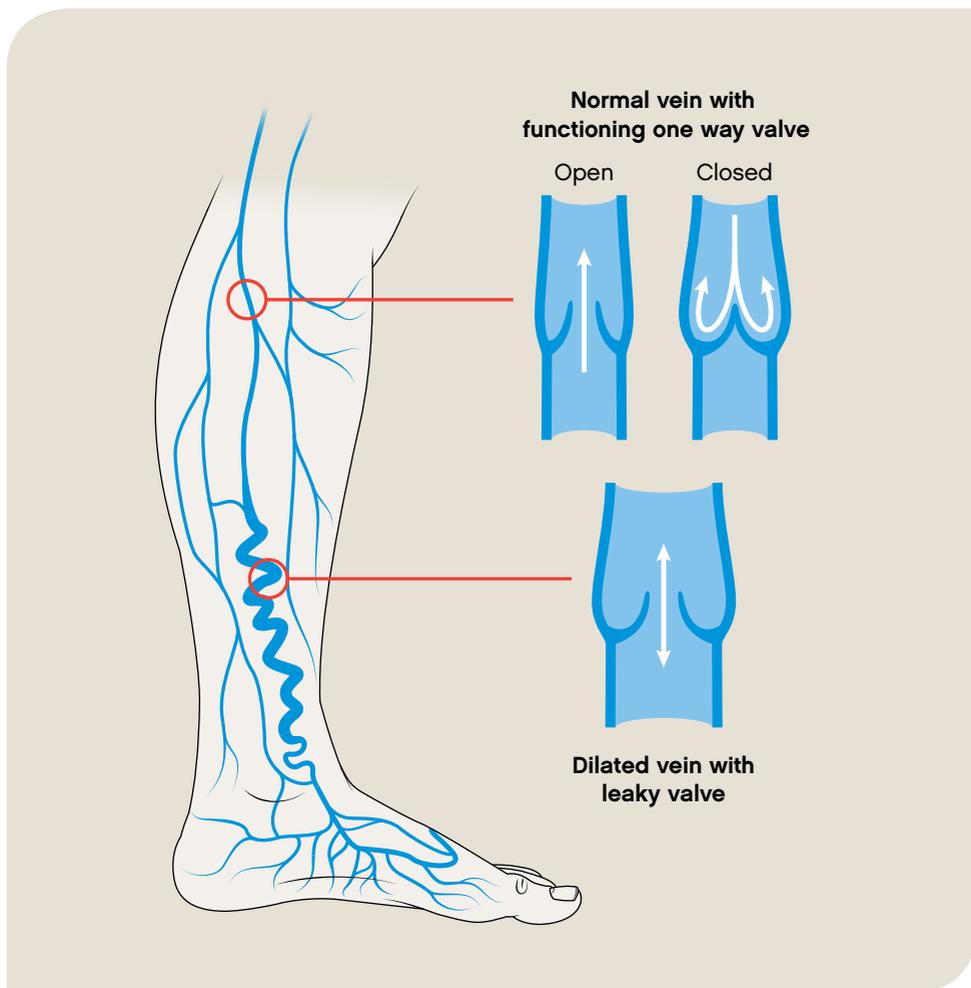
Why are compression garments important?

Compression garments, (or compression stockings) are recommended for people who have venous disease.

Venous disease is an abnormal circulatory condition. Valves in the vein which normally close to keep blood flowing in the right direction become weak and don't close properly. Blood flows backward and pools in the leg veins. This can lead to swelling, varicose veins, venous leg wounds, pain and discomfort.

Compression garments support your veins to help blood to return to your heart, and reduce the long term effects of venous disease. You may have had a venous leg wound which has healed with compression bandaging

Although the bandaging has assisted your leg wound to heal, it does not completely 'fix' the problem with your veins. It is necessary for you to continue to wear compression garments to manage your venous disease. This also reduces the chances of the wound recurring. You will need to do this for the rest of your life.



What can I do?

Apply your garments correctly

- If you have been advised to take your garments off at night, it is important that they are applied as you get out of bed in the morning because your leg begins swelling within 30 minutes
- Ensure your leg is clean and dry
- If you have been supplied with a garment application aid, make sure you or your carer have been shown how to use it, and use it to put your garments on
- If you do not have an aid, it is advisable to wear kitchen-style rubber gloves when putting your garments on and taking them off. These will help you grip the material easily. These also prevent damage to your garments and skin from sharp fingernails or rings

Follow these steps:

1. Turn the leg of the garment inside out, down as far as the heel. Except for the foot, the inside of your garment must be facing outwards
2. Use both of your thumbs to stretch the foot of the garment open and pull the garment over the foot
3. Grip the folded edge of the garment and pull it over your heel
4. Once all the leg of the garment is above your ankle, reach inside with your thumbs and ease the fabric up your leg in a zig zag movement toward the knee (do not pull the top seam up as hard as you can as this will damage the fabric)



Check the following:

1. There should be two fingers-width below the back of your knee and the top of your garment
2. Ensure the heel section fits correctly over the heel
3. For open-toe garments ensure the edge is positioned at the base of the toes
4. Do not roll the top or bottom of the garment over
5. Ensure the fabric of the garment is evenly spread along your leg as fluid can collect in loose pockets

You may wear a sock or stocking over the top to help protect the garment and also coordinate with your clothes. Ensure this is not tight.

Do go back to the health professional who fitted your garment if you experience any problems in applying or removing them, as there are many useful tips and aids to make it easier.

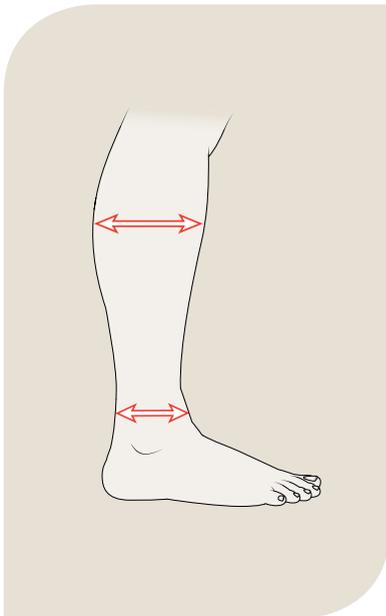
Removing your garments

1. Take hold of the top and pull it down to the ankle
2. Insert your finger/s between the stocking and your leg and stretch it over your ankle
3. Slowly pull the stocking off your foot



Replacing your garments

- Your garments **must be** replaced every 3, 6 or 12 months depending on usage and care. Your health professional will guide you on the frequency of replacement for you
- Make a note on your calendar so you know when the garments are due to be replaced
- It is not possible for your leg to feel the garment getting looser. This is why it is important to plan for routine replacement
- Ensure you know your leg measurements from when your garments were first fitted. Before ordering your replacement garments, remeasure your legs or ask someone to do this for you. If the measurements are greater or less than 3cm from your original measurements, go back to your health professional for remeasuring (see diagram).
- If the measurements are the same as your original measurements, reorder an identical pair. Your health professional should explain how to reorder garments



Measure the widest part of your calf

Measure the narrowest part of your ankle

Washing your garments

- Always read and follow the manufacturer's instructions about caring for your garments
- Handwash gently in warm water with a mild soap/detergent, or in a clothes bag on a gentle machine cycle
- Do not use bleach, fabric softeners or hot water
- Squeeze excess water in a towel and drip dry inside or in the shade
- Do not dry with artificial heat or iron
- Proper handling will extend the life of your garments

What else?

- If you have been advised to remove your garments at night, this is the best time to apply moisturiser. Moisturiser can cause the elastic in the garment to wear out faster. It may be difficult to apply your garment with moisturiser on your leg
- It is normal for the garment to be pulled up or repositioned a few times during the day

Tips to remember

- 1 **Garments NEED to be firm-fitting to do their job and may feel tight at first. If you experience new pain, discomfort, numbness or tingling in your legs or feet when you are wearing your garments, remove them and speak to your doctor or nurse**
- 2 **Taking garments on and off will be difficult, but it will get easier with practice and time. Don't rush when putting them on**
- 3 **Your garments must be replaced every 3, 6 or 12 months depending on usage and care**

References

European Wound Management Association (2003) *Position document: Understanding Compression Therapy*. http://fewma.org/fileadmin/user_upload/EWMA/pdf/Position_Documents/2003/Spring_2003_English_.pdf (accessed May 2011)

Johnson, S. (2002). *Compression hosiery in the prevention and treatment of venous leg ulcers*. World Wide Wounds <http://www.worldwidewounds.com/2002/september/Johnson/Compression-Hosiery-Leg-Ulcers.html> (accessed May 2011)

Disclaimer

This health care guide is part of the 'Connected Wound Care' program, which provides important information about wound care. All care has been taken to ensure information is current and best-practice, however always consult your healthcare professional if you have any concerns or queries.

Acknowledgements

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