Human BioSciences

Tel: +1 301-740-1893
info@humanbiosciences.com

What is a Venous Leg Ulcer?

A wound occurs when blood leaks into the skin from the veins, causing the skin to break down or develop an ulcer. This happens when the blood does not move through the veins toward the heart as it should. The valves in the legs become incompetent due to vascular disease. Men and women are both at risk.

Who is at Risk?

✓ Have had an injury to the leg
✓ Have had certain conditions such as varicose veins, a blood clot in the leg.
✓ Multiple pregnancies
✓ Obesity
✓ Have a job that requires long periods of standing or sitting.

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Clean and dress your wound as your doctor directs you to. The skin around the wound must be protected from the fluid that drains from the wound. If not, the skin may break down and make the wound larger. Using a zinc oxide cream (diaper rash cream) around your wound will help protect the skin from breakdown. Use compression therapy as recommended by your doctor. Compression stockings and other special leg bandages put pressure on the wound and surrounding skin. This helps your muscles push blood back up through the veins and reduce swelling in your lower leg. Always follow directions for washing and drying your garments to avoid damage to elasticity. This will ensure longer wear times. Eat a healthy diet that includes lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, and drink plenty of fluids. Protein is essential in enhancing wound healing times. Exercise regularly, as your doctor recommends.

Wear fitted compression stockings. This is especially important anytime your legs are below the level of your heart. Since support stockings gradually stretch out, replace them every 6 months. Elevate your legs above heart level as much as possible. Do not cross your legs If you are standing for long periods of time at work i.e. repeatedly shift your weight from one foot to the other. Never wear tight clothing, shoes, garters, girdles, or knee-high socks.

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What can you do?

Once your leg ulcer has healed, you still need to watch the area closely since leg ulcers often return. You can help prevent a leg ulcer from returning, or forming, by protecting your skin, living a healthy lifestyle, and maintaining good circulation. Moisturize skin daily. Avoid moisturizing creams with perfumes, aloe, and lanolin.

When should I call my doctor about my wound?

- Increased pain
- Increased swelling
- Red and warmth surrounding wound and or skin
- Increased drainage
- Smelly drainage after cleansing your wound during dressing changes.

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