

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT VENOUS LEG ULCERS

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What Are Venous Leg Ulcers?

Venous leg ulcers (VLU) are sores or wounds that develop on the skin of the leg. These sores can take a long time to heal and sometimes come back after treatment. VLU happens because of poor blood flow in the veins of the legs. You are at higher risk for VLU if you:

- Are over 55 years old
- Have problems with blood flow in the legs
- Have a family history of blood flow problems
- Have a history of blood clots
- Have bone or joint disease, such as arthritis, in your leg or ankle
- Are a person with obesity
- Sit or stand for long periods
- Have had multiple pregnancies

What Are the Warning Signs?

- A painful sore on the lower leg or ankle
- Swelling and aching in the leg
- Discolored skin on the leg

How Are They Diagnosed?

- Your doctor will ask you questions about your medical history and closely examine the leg.
- Your doctor may take a picture of your veins called an ultrasound. Sometimes other tests are needed, such as a CT scan, which takes more pictures of your veins and gives additional information to your doctor.
- You may need a blood test. In some cases, your doctor may take a small sample of the skin from your leg for testing.

How Are They Treated?

- Your wound will be cleaned and bandaged to prevent infection and help it heal.
- Compression devices must be worn. These devices may be in the form of multiple tight bandages or a soft cast worn on your lower legs to help with blood flow and decrease swelling.
- Your doctor may tell you to raise your feet above your heart as often as possible. You can do this by lying down or sitting with your feet raised on a pillow or chair.
- Your doctor may prescribe medicines to help your sores heal.
- Over-the-counter medicines can be taken to help manage pain.



- If your VLU keeps coming back, you may need other treatments.

How Can They Be Prevented?

Doctors are not yet sure if VLU can be prevented.

However, there are things you can do to lower your risk and prevent VLU from coming back:

- Keep health conditions, such as heart failure, diabetes, or peripheral artery disease (PAD), under control.
- Avoid sitting or standing for long periods.
- Eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly.
- Try to maintain a healthy weight.
- Wear compression stockings.
- Surgery to stop VLU from coming back may be an option for some people. Ask your doctor if it is right for you.

Questions for My Doctor

- What caused my VLU?
- What should I do if my VLU keeps coming back?
- Will I need surgery?
- Will I need more testing?
- Should I clean my sores with special soap?
- How often should I change my bandages?
- How should I dress my sores after I shower?
- Do I have to wear compression stockings all day and night?
- How can I reduce my risk for getting VLU again?

For More Information



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www.aafp.org/afp/2010/0415/p1003.html

Medline Plus

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/patientinstructions/000744.htm