

# Skin Health

*A 3M Guide to Understanding Skin and  
Leg Problems Related to Venous Insufficiency*



3M Medical

*from the 3M Health Care family*



# Understanding Venous Insufficiency

Venous insufficiency affects about one in twenty persons and it occurs more frequently in older adults. Your chance of developing venous insufficiency increases if you have experienced one or more of the following:

- previous deep vein thrombosis (DVT—blood clot) and varicose veins
- restricted ability to walk, either partially or completely, e.g., from arthritis or paralysis
- being overweight
- inflammation of a vein—phlebitis; this may occur for a number of reasons including following certain illnesses, after surgery or following childbirth
- leg fracture or certain orthopedic procedures
- congestive heart failure
- previous history of vascular surgeries such as vein ligations or varicose vein “stripping”



The veins in your legs contain a system of small, one-way valves that open to allow blood to move upward and toward the heart, and then close to prevent the backflow of blood. Some conditions can damage these valves leading to increased pressure within the veins. Initially, this increased pressure causes swelling to occur in the lower legs, ankles and feet.

Over time, this backflow of blood and the accompanying increased pressure and swelling can get progressively worse. This condition is called venous insufficiency.

Skin damage begins when the swelling is not kept in check. The swelling can cause noticeable changes to the skin on your legs. These changes include redness and, over time, rough, dry, scaly patches of brownish discoloration may form. This combination of skin changes is referred to as venous dermatitis. Venous dermatitis can produce severe itching. When you scratch to ease the discomfort of the itching, you can cause superficial injury to the skin. These seemingly harmless surface scratches can actually progress to deeper, more serious wounds, commonly called venous ulcers. Seemingly minor incidents, such as hitting your leg on a car door or table, can also result in venous ulcers and may require a long time to heal.

If you have an ulcer or skin change on your leg that just won't "go away," you should consult your health care professional.

## Diagnosis

Your health care professional can make a correct diagnosis of venous insufficiency and recommend treatment. Your medical history and visual observation of your legs may be all your physician needs to make a diagnosis. If there is any doubt about your condition, there are a few medical tests which can be performed to examine the status of your veins.

Problems or symptoms commonly seen with venous insufficiency include:

- swelling in the lower legs, feet and/or ankles
- skin ulcers that won't "go away" or heal
- brown or red skin discoloration
- rough, dry, scaly skin on your legs
- severe itching, leading to scratching and skin surface injuries

If you are experiencing any of these conditions, you may have venous insufficiency which can lead to skin and wound problems on the lower leg.



However, not all leg and skin conditions are the result of venous insufficiency. That's why it is important to determine the cause of your particular condition so proper treatment can be prescribed.

## **Treatment**

If you are diagnosed with venous insufficiency, and swelling and leg ulcers are present, treatment recommendations may include:

- Instruction to elevate your leg(s) whenever possible, preferably higher than the level of your heart.
- Compression bandages to bring swelling under control and heal venous ulcers. It is essential to make sure that there is adequate circulation to the legs before using compression bandages.

For care of the venous ulcer, your health care professional has many dressing options to choose from and will prescribe a treatment that is specific to your situation.

After your wounds have healed, your health care provider will recommend wearing compression stockings on an ongoing basis to help prevent recurrence of your leg symptoms. For maximum effectiveness, compression stockings need to be worn throughout the day to help control swelling and assist with circulation in the legs. You may remove the stockings before going to bed because compression therapy is not required when the legs are elevated.

## **Skin Care**

Keep your skin clean using a gentle liquid skin cleanser or a mild bar soap. Ask your health care provider to recommend a moisturizer that does not contain perfumes, alcohol or other unnecessary additives which may lead to skin sensitivities or rashes.

## **Exercise**

Your health care professional may also recommend a certain amount of exercise, depending on the severity of your venous insufficiency. Ankle exercises or walking are usually prescribed, as these activities are the best way to assist circulation.

## **Body Weight**

Maintaining your ideal body weight is also very important in helping to reduce complications related to venous insufficiency. Strive to limit unnecessary calories through a balanced diet and regular exercise.



# General Precautions

There are a few additional precautions you can take in preventing complications of venous insufficiency:

- Do not wear stockings with constricting bands, or tight shoes. These interfere with circulation.
- Avoid sitting with your legs crossed.
- Do not stand for long periods of time. Walk as much as you comfortably can several times a day. This will improve your circulation.
- Notify your health care professional if you experience any increased swelling, pain, warmth or redness in your legs. These symptoms could be a sign of infection which requires prompt attention.
- Notify your health care professional of any rashes, redness or itching. Skin sensitivity is common with venous insufficiency and may be an indication to discontinue a particular product you're using.
- Report any open area skin injury to your health care professional for assessment and appropriate treatment.

# Special Information

Your health care professional can assist you with product selection and proper use. Be sure and ask questions if you don't understand something about your treatment. Since venous leg ulcers need to be checked on a regular basis, your health care professional will also establish a schedule of appointments so your condition is monitored as effectively and efficiently as possible.

## Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Health care professional

Phone Number

---

Medical products supplier

Phone Number

---

Home health care agency

Phone Number



### Medical

3M Center, Building 275-4W-02  
St. Paul, MN 55144-1000  
USA  
1 800 228-3957  
[www.3M.com/healthcare](http://www.3M.com/healthcare)

### 3M Canada

Post Office Box 5757  
London, Ontario N6A 4T1  
Canada  
1 800 563-2921

*Please Recycle*

Printed in U.S.A.  
© 3M 2006. All Rights Reserved.  
70-2009-7456-9