

## Venous Leg Ulcers



### What is a venous leg ulcer?

A venous ulcer usually an ulcer (sore) that develops on the inside of the leg just above the ankle. It is usually a chronic ulcer and some patients may have the ulcer for many years. It is termed a venous ulcer as it usually caused by increased pressure in the veins either as a result of chronic venous insufficiency (like varicose veins) or an obstruction in the veins (like a deep vein thrombosis - DVT).

### How common is it?

Venous ulceration is the most common cause of leg ulcers. It is thought that 1 in 500 people will have a venous ulcer and 1 in 50 people over the age of 80 years will have it.

### What are the risk factors for developing a venous ulcer?

Venous leg ulcers tend to occur in patients who suffer from varicose veins or have had a previous DVT. It occurs more commonly in elderly patients and your risk is higher if you are obese.

### What are symptoms of a venous leg ulcer?

Venous leg ulcers usually occur on the inside of the leg just above the ankle. They are usually open wounds which are pink or red and are usually painful. These ulcers are usually accompanied by other symptoms of increased venous pressure including

- Swelling of the ankles
- Discolouration of the skin around the ankle and foot



- A foul smelling discharge from the ulcer
- Hardening of the skin around the ulcer edge and ankle such that the ankle looks like a Champagne glass
- Enlarged varicose veins

These ulcers may become infected in which case the patient may develop a fever and the skin surrounding the ulcer may become red, warm and painful.

### How do you treat a venous leg ulcer?

Patients with venous leg ulcers will require evaluation by a specialist. The underlying cause needs to be treated, and this is usually a surgical intervention on the veins followed by compression.

Surgical intervention aims to reduce the pressure in the veins. This will depend on the cause of the ulcer and may require intervention as an outpatient or in some cases will require you to be admitted to hospital.

Compression therapy is where specialised bandages are wrapped around the leg to control the pressure in the veins. This is usually done by a specialised wound care practitioner. Other parameters such as nutrition and oxygen supply to the wound also needs to be evaluated and treated on their merits.

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