



## **LEG ULCER**

### **DO YOU HAVE A LEG ULCER? OR PERHAPS YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO DOES?**

#### **WHAT IS A LEG ULCER?**

A leg ulcer is an open wound that occurs in the lower part of the leg. It may become chronic, painful and slow to heal.

#### **ARE LEG ULCERS COMMON?**

Leg ulcers are a health problem affecting about 1% of the elderly population. The cost of treating a leg ulcer is estimated at £1,000 per person per year.

#### **WHAT CAUSES LEG ULCERS?**

75% of all leg ulcers are caused by venous hypertension or varicose veins. They are known as venous leg ulcers.

15% of leg ulcers are mainly due to narrowing of the arteries. These are called arterial leg ulcers. The remaining 10% are due to a variety of diseases.

Other factors which may cause or aggravate leg ulcers are; poor diet, overweight, poor levels of exercise, stress, not enough rest and some medical conditions including diabetes and arthritis.

#### **WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE A LEG ULCER?**

Visit your local GP or Public Health nurse. It is important that your leg ulcer is fully assessed to determine what treatment is suitable for you. If necessary, you may be referred to a vascular physician or other leg ulcer specialist.

#### **WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR LEG ULCERS?**

Treatment differs for venous and arterial leg ulcers. Having your leg ulcer assessed before treatment is vital.

#### **TREATMENT FOR ARTERIAL LEG ULCERS**

A good assessment is important for diagnosing and treating arterial leg ulcers. A compression bandage is not suitable and in fact may cause harm. Maintaining a good blood supply to the lower leg is a priority. Walking is a very good exercise for this. It is important to give up smoking and eat a well balanced diet.

#### **TREATMENT FOR VENOUS LEG ULCERS**

Research shows that the most effective treatment for diagnosed venous leg ulcers is a bandage from the toe to the knee. This is called a compression bandage. Some people need to wear up to four layers of bandages at a time. These

bandages are specially prescribed by your doctor to help heal your venous leg ulcer.

### **WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP HEAL MY VENOUS LEG ULCER?**

To help your leg ulcer to heal faster, it is good to do the following:

- **Make sure your bandage feels comfortable at all times.**
- **Walk as much as you can everyday.**
- **Avoid standing**

Sit down whenever you can e.g. ironing, preparing meals, waiting at the bus stop.

- **Try to take plenty of rest.**

Rest for at least one hour twice daily either in bed or with your feet up as shown below.

The feet and legs should be just above the level of the heart. If necessary adjust the position until you feel comfortable.

Avoid using a footstool as it may cause a pooling of blood in the legs. A footstool can also put too much stress on the knee joint.

- **Do your ankle exercises regularly**

Move your ankles up, down and around whenever you get a chance, e.g. reading, watching television. This helps the circulation and keeps ankle joints supple.

- **Watch your weight**

Being overweight can make varicose veins worse. Regular exercise and a well balanced eating plan will help control your weight.

- **Avoid too much stress**
- **Have a check up regularly**

### **Support stockings**

In order to prevent recurrence of your venous ulcer it is essential to wear fitted support stockings or socks. Your Public Health Nurse, GP, or hospital personnel will advise you on this.

Put your support stockings on before you get out of bed in the mornings otherwise your ankles will swell quickly.

### **Remember!**

Your support stockings will need to be renewed every 3 – 6 months.

### **Food Pyramid**

\*\*\*\*\***(SEE DIAGRAM)**\*\*\*\*\*

- **Eat a well balanced diet.**

It is important for everybody with a venous or arterial leg ulcer to eat a well balanced diet.

Use the Food Pyramid above to help plan your daily food choices

Try to get the most out of your food from the bottom shelves – cereals, bread, potatoes, fruit and vegetables with smaller, but important amounts of milk, cheese and yogurt, meat, fish, poultry and egg shelves.

Fruit and vegetables provide many essential nutrients needed for healing including vitamins A and C and zinc. Aim to eat 4 or more portions of fruit and vegetables every day.

Iron promotes wound healing by helping blood cells carry oxygen to the leg ulcers. Good sources, include red meat, fortified breakfast cereals, bread, eggs and green vegetables (cabbage, brussels sprouts, broccoli, spinach).

Foods rich in vitamin C help your body to absorb iron. Good sources include potatoes oranges, kiwi, grapefruit, fruit juice and green vegetables.

**WHERE CAN I FIND THE PUBLIC HEALTH NURSE?**

*You can contact your Public Nurse at your Local Health Centre.*

*Your GP can also refer you.*

*Leaflets on healthy eating, healthy weight, exercise and giving up smoking are available from the Health Promotion Unit or from your local Health Board*