

Venous Ulcers

Causes:

Venous ulcers are caused by severe or long-term leg swelling from backward blood flow in the veins. Trauma, such as cuts or blisters, may also cause ulcers.

Signs and Symptoms:

The skin on your lower legs may become a bluish/brownish color. Open sores may develop, with clear or blood-tinged drainage. You may also develop swelling and a feeling of heaviness in your legs. Many people complain of a burning or aching sensation.

Prevention:

Avoid severe or prolonged swelling of the ankles. Wear compression stockings as prescribed by your physician. Elevate your legs above the level of your heart for 30-60 minutes three times a day. Avoid pillows under your knees. Do not sit or stand for prolonged periods of time. Avoid crossing your legs, constricting garments, and injury to your legs. Reduce sodium (salt) intake, as this causes fluid retention.

Treatment:

When in bed, elevate your legs higher than the level of your heart. Also, elevate your legs as much as possible during the day. Wear compression hose or elastic bandages as prescribed by your physician. Follow your physician's orders for care of the ulcer.

Unna Boot:

Unna Boots are often used to treat venous ulcers. This consists of a zinc-impregnated gauze applied from your foot to below your knee, which is then covered with a compression bandage. The gauze will harden slightly to form a snug boot and helps improve blood flow in the veins and reduce swelling which helps to heal the ulcer. The boot is changed weekly. You may not allow the boot to become wet. Some patients insert their leg into a plastic garbage bag and secure it with duct tape in order to shower. Please be careful if you do this, as it is very slippery in the shower. You may remove the Unna Boot prior to your office visit and shower. Be sure to clean the ulcer using antibacterial soap and rinse well with water. Please call the office if you develop tingling, numbness, or increased swelling. Remember, it may take weeks to months to heal venous ulcers.