

Compression bandaging information sheet

Plastic Surgery Department

You have been given this information sheet because you need special bandages to treat the wound on your leg. These are called compression bandages.

If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is compression?

Compression is when specialist bandages or hosiery are applied to the leg with a wound. These bandages compress the leg and assist blood flow in the leg and reduce swelling.

Why do I need it?

Compression bandages improve the blood flow from your legs back to the heart, reduce swelling around the wound and help the wound to heal. There are different bandaging systems available and the nurse will decide on the most suitable one for you. It is important that compression bandages are applied by a qualified nurse because if they are applied incorrectly they can cause harm to the affected leg.

Before deciding to use compression bandages, the nurses at the Plastic Dressing Clinic or your community nurse need to undertake a simple test called an "ankle brachial pressure index test" (ABPI). This will be arranged by your community nurses or with the nurses at the Plastic Dressing Clinic. This test will involve you lying as flat as you can for 20-30 minutes. A blood pressure cuff will be used to take readings from both arms and your affected leg. From this the team can confirm if the blood vessels that supply blood to the leg will continue to do so even if compression bandages are applied.

What happens if the ABPI indicates my blood supply going into the leg will be reduced if compression is applied?

The nurse will discuss the results with you. Sometimes the result may indicate a need to undertake further tests to assess the blood supply into the leg. If the flow of blood into the leg is causing the delay in healing in some cases a referral to the Vascular Team may be required.

How is compression bandaging applied?

- You will have a dressing covering your wound and the compression bandaging over the top of this.
- Your leg will be bandaged from the base of your toes to just underneath your knee using a bandaging system of which there may be a variety of layers. It is important to make sure the bandages are applied from the toes to prevent your foot and the top of your calf from swelling.
- The bandages should feel firm but allow free movement of your leg and ankle.

- You will usually remain in compression bandaging until your wound is completely healed with dressing changes once to twice a week depending on how much fluid your wound is producing.

What can I do to help the wound to heal?

- **Supportive footwear.** You will need supportive footwear that will allow for extra padding around your foot, a trainer is ideal.
- **Mobilise.** If you can, actually walking around is beneficial as the compression system works with the movement of the leg, helping to improve circulation around the leg.
- **Elevate.** When resting, it is advisable to keep the leg elevated to help reduce swelling and to avoid standing still for long periods.
- **Keeping dry.** The bandages need to be kept dry so take care during washing/bathing.
- **Do not try to re-apply.** If the bandaging becomes loose or slips, do not try to re-apply it yourself as the bandaging needs to be applied by a qualified person who has applied compression before. Contact Plastic Dressing Clinic or your GP practice immediately if this occurs.
- **Make sure you are having a well-balanced healthy diet.**
- **Smoking can delay healing so seek support from a smoking cessation clinic to assist you to give up.**

Is there anything I should be watching for when I have the bandages on?

- If the bandages slip or come loose do not attempt to reapply your bandages as this could be dangerous and result in the wound getting worse. Compression bandages should only be applied by nurses who have undergone specialist training.
- If you have any of the problems listed below it may be necessary for you to remove the compression bandages immediately and contact your nurse straightaway:
 - Numbness or tingling of your toes
 - Cramp
 - Bluish discoloration of your toes
 - Excessive coldness in the toes
 - Increasing pain following application of the compression bandages
 - Bandages have slipped down your leg (slipped bandages can often cause tight bands around the leg, creating circulation problems and new ulcers)
 - Unusual swelling of your toes/knees where the bandage starts and finishes
 - Itching of your leg (more than usual)

If you notice any of these signs, cut off the top elasticated layer of the bandages and contact the Plastic Dressing Clinic or your GP immediately.

- Sometimes the bandages can cause dry and/or itchy skin.

What will happen if I decide not to have the compression bandages?

The nurses caring for you have identified that the use of compression may assist in the healing rate of your wound but if you choose not to have the treatment the wound can still be dressed.

It is possible that it will take longer to heal and may not heal at all. The nurse will identify the specific relevance for you when discussing if compression bandaging is appropriate for you.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

The nurse applying the above dressing will arrange a review in the Plastic Dressing Clinic between 1-2 weeks.

Useful resources

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Leg-ulcer-venous/Pages/Treatment.aspx>

<https://cks.nice.org>leg-ulcer-venous>

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns please contact the Plastic Dressing Clinic nurses on 020 8725 0473 or the lead clinical nurse in plastic surgery on 020 8672 1071, or call switchboard on 020 8672 1255 and ask for bleep 6332 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm). Out of hours, please contact Keate ward on 020 8725 3226 or 3227.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

