

## What are compression stockings?

Graduated compression stockings are the best-known method of preventing swelling of the legs and feet, after a period of being wrapped with bandages.

These stockings provide a measured amount of compression to the lower legs.

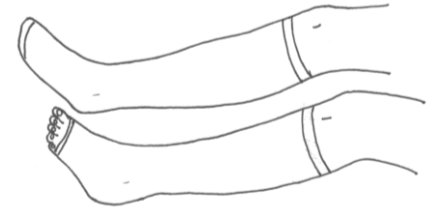
They come in open and closed-toe, knee or thigh-length versions.

Stockings should go on first thing in the morning before your legs start to swell.

You can remove them at bedtime, but you CAN wear them at night if you cannot get them on and off by yourself.

If you wear them overnight, they should fit smoothly without causing deep creases or folds in the skin.

It is important that certified stocking specialist measure your legs to fit them.



## What kind is right for you?

Your doctor and nurse will decide on what strength will be best for you, after testing and examining your circulation and legs. Key points to remember are:

- Often the legs are wrapped with compression bandages until the swelling is controlled, or any open wound or ulcer is healed, and then you are measured for the stockings.
- Low compression stockings can be bought without a prescription, and may look like nylons or stockings.
- Higher therapeutic graduated compression stockings always require a doctor's prescription.
- Never wear a pair of stockings that were ordered for another person.
- Special Considerations: If you are Diabetic and have decreased sensation in your legs and feet, you must be very careful when wearing compression stockings. Any increase in discoloration of your toes or feet must be reported to your doctor.

## How do I care for my compression stockings?

Washing re-sets the elastic compression so that they fit the best when washed often.

You should follow the instructions they came with.

If there were none, use mild soap meant for clothing and wash by hand.

**NEVER** use liquid hand or dish soap or shampoo.

Hang them to dry- never place in an electric dryer.

If you have two pairs of stockings you can wash one pair while you are wearing the other pair.

## Putting on knee-high stockings

1. Before putting the stocking on, turn it inside out down to the heel, and put on the special rubber gloves to help with application.
2. Slip your toes into the foot part.
3. Work the rest of the stocking up over the foot until the heel is in place. Then pull the rest of the stocking carefully over the heel area.
4. Do not pull on the top of the stockings—this only stretches the fabric and the stocking will move back down the leg.
5. Use the rubber gloves to move the stocking up the leg, 2-3" at a time, smoothing out any

wrinkles with the gloves. There should be no wrinkles or creases when they are on. Try to even the stretch of the fabric over the whole leg, so that no one area is more stretched than another or that there are folds. This is especially important at the front of the foot between the ankles where there is a tendon.



6. Pull out the fabric at the toe when you are finished, making sure that no toes are overlapping or nails are caught on the fabric.
7. Knee-length stockings should reach 1-2 finger widths below the crease behind the knee—no further and no lower. Do not fold stockings back down.

### Taking them off

1. Pull the stockings off inside out. If the heel does not come off freely, put on the gloves and using them, ease the stocking off the heel.
2. Provide skin care after removal because the skin will be dry.

### How often should I replace them?

One of the most difficult things about compression stockings is that even though they may still feel tight, they actually stretch and lose their ability to control the edema or the venous problem in your legs.

You need to replace them and throw these old stockings away **every 4- 6 months**.

If you are alternating stockings with two pairs, two pairs will **last 8 -12 months**.

Scientific testing shows that the stockings lose pressure after just one month of wear, and by 6 months they are not providing you with the amount of compression needed, so that skin breakdown and complications will start to happen.

### Take Care of Your Skin

The skin often becomes dry, itchy or flaky under compression stockings.

- Use moisturizers every night after the stockings are removed. A lotion or cream that contains urea or lactic acid is good, but avoid ones that contain perfume, latex, dyes or lanolin—these can cause allergic skin rashes. Some examples of doctor-approved products are: Uremol cream, Attractain cream, plain Vaseline petroleum ointment, or Cliniderm cream, or Moisturel lotion.
- Do not apply lotions before putting on the stockings; they will destroy the fabric of the stockings and shorten their “life”.
- If you use soap make sure it is mild- dermatologists suggest Dove for sensitive skin.
- Avoid extremes of temperature e.g. hot baths
- Do not soak for hours in the bath.
- Do not put disinfectant or salt in the bathwater.

### You can help to improve your condition

- Do not sit or stand in one position for a long time or cross your legs
- Do not sit in a chair so that the edge of the seat is pressed against the back of your legs
- Lay down with your legs 10-12” above your heart for 20 minutes at a time (unless you cannot do

this for other health reasons)

- Walk or exercise regularly
- When sitting, move your legs and feet - pull your toes up to point towards your knees then point your foot and draw imaginary circles with your toes, or write the letters of the alphabet. Repeat this 10 times, four times a day. ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
- While standing at the kitchen or bathroom counter-top, raise both heels off of the ground, causing the calf muscles to contract. Repeat this 10 times, four times a day.
- When walking, do not shuffle, but use a heel-to-toe movement. If this is difficult, ask your doctor to have a physiotherapy referral made.
- Take care not to bang your feet or legs. Watch out for sharp corners and objects.
- If you have aching or tightness in your legs, it might be because you have been inactive for a while. Get up and walk around and do some leg and ankle exercises. The aching and tightness should go away.

Every time that you apply or remove stockings, do a visual check to see if there are any signs of:

- redness, rash, swelling, firmness or open areas
- deep creases in the skin especially around the ankle area
- signs of weeping or drainage on the stockings from open areas

## See your doctor or nurse

- a. You should see your doctor once every three months to examine your skin and ensure that the stockings are working well for you.
- b. Once every 6- 12 months, a test should be done of your circulation to check that the strength of stocking is still correct.
- c. Call the doctor or nurse if you notice:
  - Redness, rash, swelling, firmness or open areas
  - An increase in leg pain when wearing the stockings
  - Any pain deep in the calf muscle.
  - Increased pain in legs and feet when laying in bed that is relieved by putting the leg over the side of the bed or getting up
  - Symptoms of cramping in your legs when walking a certain distance
  - Weight gain or loss
  - Weeping open areas occur
  - Skin infection

*Remember: compression is for LIFE!*