



Focus on Compression Therapy

What You Need to Know About Compression Therapy for Deep Vein Thrombosis and Post-Thrombotic Syndrome

What Is Compression Therapy?

When the body retains fluid in a specific area, such as the legs, arms, or abdomen, the subsequent swelling is referred to as **edema**. If you have edema, compression therapy may be recommended to prevent or control the swelling.

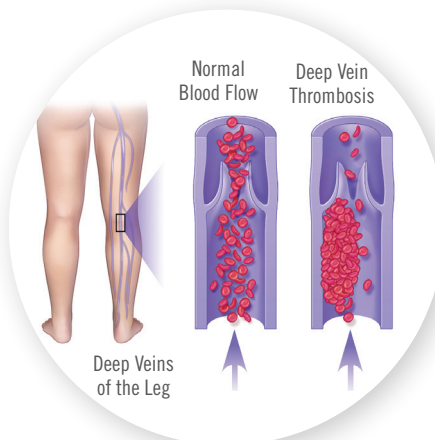
Compression therapy means wearing an item of clothing, typically stockings, to improve circulation by preventing fluid buildup. Aside from stockings, apparel can be sleeves, pantyhose, or leotards, depending on the location and type of swelling you have.

There are several situations when compression therapy may be helpful, including:

- Tired legs
- Varicose veins
- Chronic venous insufficiency (CVI)
- Lymphedema
- Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)

What Is Deep Vein Thrombosis?

Deep vein thrombosis, commonly referred to as DVT, occurs when a blood clot (**thrombus**) develops in the large veins of the legs, pelvic (hip) area, or arm. Some DVTs may cause no pain, but others can be quite painful. If DVTs are identified and treated early, very few are life-threatening, and many people recover completely. Others may still have pain and discomfort where it occurred.



What Is Post-Thrombotic Syndrome?

When a clot forms in a vein, the clot—or the swelling that the clot causes—can damage the valves inside the vein. The damaged valves, as well as the clot, prevent blood from going from the leg to the heart. The lack of blood flow can cause pain and discomfort. This condition is known as **post-thrombotic syndrome (PTS)**.

Overall, PTS occurs in 20 to 40% of patients who develop DVT in their legs. It is the most common DVT complication.

For more information, review these related flyers:

- DVT and Air Travel
- Lymphedema Disease
- Understanding Deep Vein Thrombosis

Do I Need Compression Stockings?

If you're having problems with leg pain and swelling due to a blood clot in your leg, wearing a stocking may relieve the pain. Wearing compression stockings also may prevent PTS. Ask your health care provider whether compression stockings would help you.

For example, if you experience poor blood flow in your leg arteries (different from your leg veins), compression stockings may not be the right choice for you. That's why it's important to talk with your provider first.

How Do Compression Stockings Work?

Compression stockings are made of special elastic fabric. Compression gently squeezes the leg muscles and vein walls. This helps move fluid up the leg and keeps it from collecting in the ankle. This improves blood flow and decreases leg pain.

How Can I Get Compression Stockings?

There are different types of compression stockings, and each type is used for different reasons. To prevent or treat PTS, your health care provider will prescribe a stocking. You should take the prescription to a pharmacy or a medical supply store that sells the stockings.

Ask someone at the pharmacy or store to measure your leg for the correct size. It is best to get measured in the morning when your leg is least swollen.

What Kind of Compression Stockings Should I Get?

The level of tightness in compression stockings is measured in millimeters of mercury (mmHg). To prevent or treat PTS, you will need a stocking that provides a compression strength of 30 to 40 mmHg. Your health care provider will indicate this on your prescription.

If you are unable to wear this strength of stocking, your health care provider may prescribe a lower strength for you.

Compression stockings come in different styles: knee-high, thigh-high, or full-length.



How Do I Put on Compression Stockings?

Compression stockings are designed to fit tightly. It may take time and practice to get used to putting them on correctly. Here are some tips to help:

- Put your stockings on first thing in the morning when your legs are less painful and swollen.
- Make sure the heel is in the correct position and the seams are straight. Gently pull the compression stocking up your leg, smoothing the extra material as you pull. If you are putting on a thigh-high or longer stocking, stand up to continue pulling it over your knee, hips, and waist. Try wearing rubber cleaning gloves to help grip and smooth over the wrinkles. Nails and bare fingers may cause a tear or a run, which may affect the compression of the stockings.
- Compression stockings should be smooth to promote circulation. Do not roll knee-high or thigh-high compression stockings at the top. Do not fold the stockings down if they seem too long. If you feel that your stockings are too tight, ask your health care provider for a lower strength.
- Apply talcum powder to your legs to make the stockings go on more smoothly. If you use a lotion, wait until the skin is dry before putting on your stockings.
- If you are having a difficult time reaching or bending, ask someone you trust or a care provider to help you with putting on and taking off the stockings.

Keep these things in mind if you use compression stockings:

- If you don't wear your compression stockings for a day or two, it may be too difficult to put them on.
- If your limbs swell too much and you cannot get the stockings on because they are too tight, you may need to wrap your limbs as your health care provider tells you to. *If you notice significant pain or worsening edema, contact your health care provider right away.*
- You may need to be remeasured every year, especially if you have gained or lost more than 15 pounds.

If you have further questions about your compression stockings, be sure to contact your health care provider.

The most important thing about compression stockings are to wear them consistently and replace them regularly. Over time, any compression clothing will lose its elasticity and its effectiveness. Compression stockings last for about four to six months with proper care.



When Do I Wear the Stockings?

If you have leg pain and swelling for several weeks after your blood clot was found, you should begin wearing the stockings as soon as possible. Remember to:

- Put on your stocking first thing in the morning, when your leg is least swollen.
- Only wear a stocking on the leg with the blood clot.
- Take off the stocking at bedtime. If you can elevate your leg while sitting or lying down in the evening, you can remove the stocking at that time as well. Take it off slowly and carefully.

How Long Do I Have to Wear the Stockings?

You should wear the stocking daily, but consult with your provider about how long you should continue use.

Caring for Compression Stockings

Generally, it is recommended to wash the stocking every other day with a mild soap. Use warm water and wash by hand or in the gentle cycle in the washing machine. After rinsing the compression stocking completely, remove excess water by rolling it in a towel. Be sure to follow the instructions on the package.



Questions for Your Doctor

It is important to work closely with your health care provider about your diagnosis and treatment. You can bring this form with you to help talk to your medical provider about any questions and concerns you may have.



