

# WHAT IS A VENOUS LEG ULCER?

## Blood circulation in the lower legs

The body has two types of blood vessels: The arteries carry blood, oxygen and nutrients around the body from the heart. Once the oxygen and nutrients are delivered to the body, the veins carry the blood back to the heart. When walking properly, the muscles in the foot and the calf help to pump the blood in the veins (venous blood) back to the heart. There are also one way valves in the veins, that open and close to stop the venous blood flowing back down the legs.

## What is a venous leg ulcer?

A venous leg ulcer is a wound between the knee and ankle that is slow to heal **because of vein problems** (Chronic Venous Insufficiency - CVI)

## Problems with the veins

If the muscle pumps in the legs don't work properly and/or the valves in the veins become damaged, blood can pool in the lower legs. Problems with the veins in the lower legs are very common, but only a small number of people with vein problems will develop a venous leg ulcer. The correct medical term for vein problems is Chronic Venous Insufficiency, or CVI.

Vein problems can be due to:

- Lack of ankle movement for any reason including not walking properly (e.g. shuffling).
- A previous blood clot in a vein of the lower leg (deep vein thrombosis).
- Damage to the veins following surgery or a fracture (broken bone).
- A family history of ulcers or varicose veins (a sign of damaged veins).
- Being overweight, constipated or having multiple pregnancies.
- Standing or sitting for long periods.

**A venous leg ulcer commonly occurs after an injury to the leg. The injury (wound) fails to heal or heals very slowly. Even a minor injury can lead to a venous leg ulcer.**

## You might have a venous leg ulcer if you have a wound on your leg that:

- Oozes a lot
- Is shallow (not deep)
- Looks red and/or yellow (not black)
- Is irregularly shaped
- Seems to not get better or worse
- Is painful (although some venous leg ulcers might not be painful)

## Other signs of vein problems

- Swelling of the leg/s that is usually worse in the evening or after standing or sitting for a while
- Varicose veins
- Skin changes that most commonly occur on the lower third of the leg, and might include:
  - Brownish discolouration
  - Dry, itchy, scaly or flaky skin
  - Firmness
  - Small whitish patches

## Help, information & treatment

**Any wound below the knee that is not improving, or has not healed in 1 month should be discussed with your healthcare professional**

Talk to your doctor or nurse about the best treatment for you. Some areas have specialised leg ulcer clinics or services that can assist with treatment.

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