

"Dos and don'ts" Help Patients With Venous, Arterial Leg Ulcers

Most nurses agree that the better a patient is informed, the better the prospects for a favorable clinical outcome for his or her condition. That makes take-home lists of clearly-worded patient "dos-and-don'ts" a favorite educational tool of many nurses. Here are separate lists for clipping and distribution to appropriate patients at risk for, or under treatment for, venous or arterial leg ulcers.

PATIENT EDUCATION

Prevention and Care of Venous Leg Ulcers

Your doctors and nurses urge you to take good care of your legs, ankles, and feet. You may be at high risk of venous leg ulcers, and you may need meticulous care for the ulcers that you already have. Here are some practical "dos and don'ts" that will help you keep your legs, ankles, and feet healthy.

DO

- Keep your legs higher than your heart when sitting or lying.
- Use support stockings or bandages as recommended.
- Maintain your ideal weight.
- Eat a balanced, nutritious diet.
- Keep feet and legs clean and well lubricated with lotions your doctor and nurse recommend.
- Inspect your legs and feet daily for any changes.
- Report changes in your legs or ulcer to your doctor or nurse (including color, size, temperature, itching, pain, odor).
- Take or apply medications as recommended by your doctor or nurse.
- Be careful to avoid bumping your legs or feet.
- Have at least two pair of support stockings so you can change to clean stockings daily.

DON'T

- Sit with legs crossed.
- Stand in the same position for long periods.
- Wear constrictive clothing such as tight shoes or socks.
- Smoke; smoking reduces your circulation.
- Use heating pads, hot water bottles, heat lamps, hot or cold solutions, or ice packs on your legs or feet.
- Scratch your legs.
- Use lotions or creams on your legs or feet that were not recommended by your doctor or nurse.
- Use adhesive tapes on your legs.

Source: Linda J. Lamont, MSN, RN, CS, CETN.

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PATIENT EDUCATION

Prevention and Care of Arterial Leg Ulcers

Poor circulation from arterial disease places you at risk for ulcers in your lower limbs. You should follow the advice of your doctors and nurses to prevent ulcers and to help any ulcers you may have to heal. Your doctor and nurse want you to examine your lower extremities every day and to report any changes to them immediately. Here are some helpful "dos and don'ts":

DO

- Follow your doctors' and nurses' directions, so that they can help you control your underlying disease, such as diabetes or elevated cholesterol levels.
- Inspect your legs, feet, and ankles every day. If necessary, use a mirror to check the bottoms of your feet. Also, check between your toes.
- Maintain your ideal body weight.
- Report to your doctor or nurse any change in color, size, temperature, itching, pain, odor.
- Avoid extremes in temperature.
- Avoid injuries to these extremities.
- Test bath water with your hand before getting into it to be sure it is not too hot or cold.
- Keep your feet warm, clean, soft, and dry.
 - Lubricate your feet to prevent cracking of the skin, but avoid lubricating between the toes.
 - Wear clean, absorbent socks or stockings (cotton is best).
- Keep your toenails trimmed; consider asking a podiatrist to do this job.
- Wear shoes that aren't too loose or too tight.
- If you have loss of feeling in your feet be sure to check inside your shoes for rough spots or harmful objects before you put your shoes on.
- Use lamb's wool between toes to keep them from rubbing together.
- Break in new shoes gradually, about a half-hour at a time. Check for and report any irritation from their use.
- Make sure your shoes have sufficient toe room.

DON'T

- Wear girdles, garters, support hose, tight socks, and other items that might cut off your circulation.
- Smoke. Smoking restricts the blood supply to the skin of your legs and feet.
- Elevate your legs and feet.
- Use preparations such as foot plasters, corn plasters and removers, disinfectants, ointments, etc, not recommended by your physician.
- Swim in cold water.
- Expose legs and feet to the sun.
- Use heating pads, hot water bottles, heat lamps, hot or cold solutions, or ice packs on your legs or feet.
- Walk barefoot. Always use slippers or shoes.

Sources: Linda J. Lamont, MSN, RN, CS, CETN, with part of the "foot" material adapted from Doyle JE, *Nursing*83;1983;13:62; copyright © 1983 by Intermed Communications, Inc., Springhouse, Pa.

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