



# Wearing Compression Stockings

**Deep venous thrombosis (DVT) is a blood clot that can be life-threatening.**

**Compression stockings may reduce the risk of developing a blood clot.**

**Wearing compression stockings may also help prevent *post-thrombotic syndrome* (PTS).**

## Why do I need compression stockings?

Your health care provider has prescribed compression stockings to help prevent *deep venous thrombosis* (DVT) and/or *post-thrombotic syndrome* (PTS).

## Why am I at risk for deep venous thrombosis (DVT)?

DVT is a blood clot that can be life-threatening. It can occur when you are less active than normal, which often happens when you are ill or in the hospital. You may also be at risk for developing a DVT if you have one or more risk factors such as advanced age, obesity, smoking, cancer, and other illnesses, or if you are having surgery.

## What is post-thrombotic syndrome (PTS)?

PTS can occur within 1 to 2 years after being diagnosed with a DVT. Symptoms include swelling of the leg, ongoing pain, discolored skin, itching, and cramps. In severe cases, skin *ulcers* (sores) can occur. In some cases, PTS cannot be cured and can become a lifelong problem.

## How do compression stockings help?

Consistently wearing the compression stocking prescribed for you will promote blood movement in your legs. This should help prevent DVT and/or PTS.

Compression stockings come in different “strengths,” meaning that some types of stockings fit tighter and have more “compression” than others. Your health care provider will prescribe the right type of stocking for you. The staff at the hospital, clinic, or medical supply store where you buy the stockings will measure your legs so that you get the right size.

## Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

### Anticoagulation Clinics:

- University of Washington Medical Center:  
206-598-4874
- Seattle Cancer Care Alliance:  
206-288-6756
- Harborview Medical Center:  
206-744-2976

## How do I wear the stockings, and for how long?

Your health care provider will tell you when and how long to wear your compression stockings. In most cases, you will start wearing the stockings right away and wear them as much as possible, except when you take a bath or shower. To prevent DVT, you will need to wear the stockings until you have fully returned to your usual level of activity. To prevent PTS, you may need to wear the stockings for 2 years or longer.

## Where do I get compression stockings?

If you have stockings placed to prevent DVT while you are in the hospital, take them home and continue to wear them as directed (these have less compression). If your health care provider prescribes stronger compression stockings, you will need to buy them at a medical supply store. Ask your health care team for help finding a medical supply store that sells them. Costs of compression stockings may be covered by your insurance.

## How do I put them on?

1. Turn the stocking inside out.
2. Place your toes in as far as they will go.
3. Pull the loose end of the stocking up over your foot and heel. This turns the stocking right-side out.
4. Hold the sides of the stocking between your thumb and first finger. Pull the stocking up over your ankle and calf.
5. Smooth out any wrinkles. Pull the stocking the rest of the way up your leg.

## Helpful Hints

- Make sure your feet and legs are dry before putting on the stockings.
- Take special care to make sure the stocking does not roll down your leg. This creates extra pressure on your leg and may cause circulation problems.
- Hand-wash the stockings in warm water with mild soap or detergent.
- For laundering purposes, you may wish to have at least 2 pairs of stockings.
- Replace your stockings every 3 to 6 months. This is important, since the elastic fibers break down over time. This decreases the amount of compression they provide.

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**UWMC Anticoagulation Clinic**

Box 356015  
1959 N.E. Pacific St. Seattle, WA 98195  
206-598-4874

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