Compression Stockings
What they are for and how to find the right kind for you

What are compression stockings for?
Your doctor has advised you to wear compression stockings. Some reasons to wear them are:

- To prevent complications caused by swelling in your legs
- To treat complications caused by leg swelling
- To help leg wounds heal more quickly

When your veins do not return blood from your feet back up to your heart like they are supposed to, fluid starts to gather in your feet and lower legs. This causes your feet and legs to swell. This swelling then stretches your skin, and this can cause irritation and sometimes a rash. The swelling also keeps blood from circulating well, which can slow down your body’s ability to heal leg wounds.

How do compression stockings work?
Compression stockings help these problems by squeezing the fluid that has gathered in your feet and legs. This helps return it back into the blood vessels where it belongs.

Are there different kinds of compression stockings?
Compression stockings come in different “strengths” of compression. They are rated by their pressure in “millimeters of mercury” or “mmHg.” Compression stockings do not contain mercury – this is just the term used to rate them.
Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Dermatology Center: 206-598-5065

Common ratings of compression stockings are:

- 8 to 15 mmHg
- 15 to 20 mmHg
- 20 to 30 mmHg
- 30 to 40 mmHg
- 40 to 50 mmHg
- 50 to 60 mmHg

Stockings with higher numbers are usually more effective. But, they are also harder to put on because they are much tighter.

Compression stockings also come in open-toe or closed-toe styles. They may be knee-high, thigh-high, or full-length stockings that go to the waist.

Where can I buy compression stockings?

You can buy compression stockings at most drugstores and online. Prices vary greatly depending on the brand. The cost of a pair of compression stockings can range from $10 to $100.

Caution

People with severe atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) may not be able to use compression stockings. If atherosclerosis has caused the blood circulation to your feet to be poor, the compression stockings can cause permanent damage. This damage may even result in loss of your foot.

Take off the compression stockings and call your doctor if:

- Your feet or calves start to hurt after wearing the compression stockings. They should feel tight, but they should not hurt.
- You start having pain when you walk.