UW Medicine
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
MEDICAL CENTER

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

This handout explains the different kinds of compression stockings, how they work, and how to find the best ones for you.

Why do I need compression stockings?

Your healthcare provider has advised you to wear compression stockings. Some reasons to wear them are to:

- Prevent problems caused by swelling in your legs

- Treat problems caused by leg swelling

- Help leg wounds heal more quickly
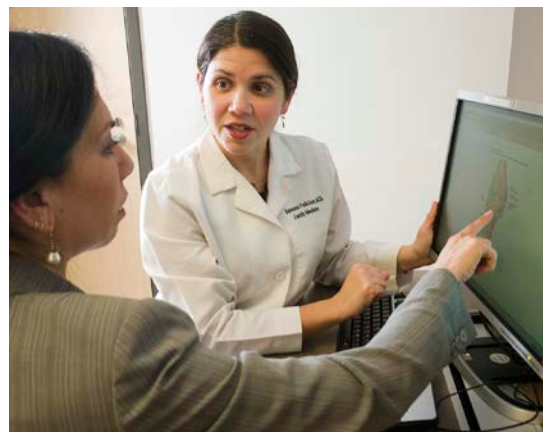
Talk with your healthcare provider if you have questions about why you need to wear compression stockings.

Leg veins normally return blood from your feet back up to your heart. If this process is not working well, fluid gathers in your feet and lower legs. This causes your feet and legs to swell. This swelling stretches your skin, which can cause irritation and even a rash. It also keeps blood from flowing well, which can slow down your body's ability to heal leg wounds.

How do the stockings work?

Compression stockings squeeze your legs, putting pressure on the fluid in the tissues. This helps the fluid move back into the blood vessels.

Are there different kinds of 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.

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

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Here are the common ratings of compression stockings:

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

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 your waist.

Ask your healthcare provider what strength and style of compression stockings you need.

If You Have Atherosclerosis

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

> **Take off the compression stockings and call your doctor if:**
> - Your feet or calves start to hurt after wearing the stockings. The stockings should feel tight, but they should not hurt.
> - You start having pain when you walk.

Where can I buy compression stockings?

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

Retail Stores

Here are some stores in the Seattle area:

Mary Catherine's

Address: 10002 Aurora Ave. N #2, Seattle, WA 98115
Phone: 206.322.1128
Hours: Weekdays 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.
           Saturdays 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Email: info@marycatherines.com

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Seattle Cancer Care Alliance

Address: 207 Pontius Ave. N, Seattle, WA 98109
Phone: 206.288.7560
Hours: Weekdays 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Saturdays 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Email: retail@seattlecca.org

Allcare Bellevue

Address: 1048 116th Ave. NE, Suite 130, Bellevue, WA 98004
Phone: 425.455.8330
Hours: Weekdays 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Saturdays 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Sundays by appointment

Allcare Renton

Address: 18123 E Valley Hwy., Suite B103, Kent, WA 98032
Phone: 425. 251.0922
Hours: Weekdays 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Saturdays 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Sundays by appointment

LegSmart Seattle

Address: 1314 Madison St., Seattle, WA 98104
Phone: 206.323.9917
Hours: Weekdays 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Saturdays 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Sundays by appointment

Online Resource

You can also find compression stockings online at the **Ames Walker** website. Visit *www.ameswalker.com* and click on "Compression Therapy."

Questions?

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

Dermatology Center: 206.598.4067

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