

UW Medicine



## Wearing Compression Stockings

*To prevent blood clots*

*This handout explains compression stockings, why they may be needed, and how to wear them.*

### What are compression stockings?

Compression stockings are special stockings that apply gentle pressure to your legs and ankles. This pressure helps keep blood flowing from your legs to your heart. Wearing compression stockings can lower your risk of blood clots.

### Why do I need to wear these stockings?

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

- **DVT** is a blood clot. It can be life-threatening.
- **PTS** can happen to people who have had a DVT in their leg. It may develop as long as 1 to 2 years after a DVT. Symptoms include leg swelling, ongoing pain, discolored skin, itching, and cramps. In severe cases, skin *ulcers* (sores) can occur. Sometimes, PTS cannot be cured. It can become a *chronic* (long-term) problem.

### Why am I at risk for DVT?

A DVT can occur when you are less active than normal. This might happen if you are ill, in the hospital, or recovering after a procedure.

You may also be at risk for a DVT if you have risk factors such as advanced age, obesity, smoking, cancer, other illnesses, or if you are having surgery.



*A DVT can occur when you are less active than normal, such as when you are ill or recovering after a procedure.*

## How do compression stockings help?

Wearing compression stockings as your provider prescribed will help the blood flow in your legs. This should help prevent DVT and PTS.

Compression stockings come in different “strengths.” This means that some types of stockings fit tighter and apply more pressure than others. Your provider will prescribe the right stocking for you. 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.

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

Most patients are told to start wearing the stockings right away and wear them as much as they can. Your provider will tell you when and how long to wear your compression stockings.

- **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 while you are in the hospital, take them home with you. Keep wearing them as directed. These stockings have less compression.

If your provider prescribes stronger compression stockings, you will need to buy them at a medical supply store. Ask your care team for help finding a medical supply store that sells them. Some insurance plans cover the costs of compression stockings.

## 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 you put 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 problems with blood flow.
- Take the stockings off when you bathe or shower.
- You may want to buy at least 2 pairs of stockings so that you can wear 1 pair while the other is being washed. Hand-wash the stockings in warm water with mild soap or detergent.
- 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.

### Questions?

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

#### Anticoagulation

##### Clinics:

- UWMC - Montlake:  
206.598.4874
- UWMC - Northwest:  
206.668.1282
- Seattle Cancer Care  
Alliance: 206.606.6756
- Harborview Medical Center:  
206.744.2976