Quality Standards

Patient Reference Guide

Venous and Mixed Venous/Arterial Leg Ulcers
Care for Patients in All Settings

December 2016

Let’s make our health system healthier
Patients, residents, families, and health care professionals partnered together on this guide to define what the best care should look like for people living with leg ulcers (venous and mixed venous/arterial leg ulcers). Leg ulcers occur when the veins in the legs do not pump blood back to the heart properly, causing the blood to pool.

The information in this guide has been created to help patients, families, and caregivers know what to ask for when receiving treatment for leg ulcers. It is based on the best available research and is designed to help ensure the highest-quality care possible.

You can use this list of recommendations to help you and your health care professionals develop a care plan that works for you. You also can use this information to become aware of what high-quality care looks like and to ask informed questions about your care. Care plans can be very different for each person, so it is important to work closely with your health care professionals.

Here are some things to consider if you or a loved one is being treated for leg ulcers.

**Understanding and Planning Your Care**

- **If you have a leg ulcer or are at risk of developing one**, you should be taught about leg ulcers and who to contact for help when you need it.

- **You should have a full assessment if you have a leg ulcer.** An assessment means that your team of health care professionals will want to learn more about your health history, your concerns, and your preferences for care. They will also examine your legs and feet, including any wounds you have. This full assessment will allow them to work with you to figure out how best they can help.

- **If your health care professional thinks you might have a leg ulcer**, you should have a test to see if you have peripheral arterial disease. This will determine what type of treatment you should receive, including whether or not you should have compression therapy. You should have this test at least once a year.

- **In addition**, your health care professional should develop, in partnership with you, a care plan that reflects your needs, concerns, and preferences. A care plan is a written document that you have agreed on with your health care professional. It describes the care you are to receive, who will provide it, and your goals for your care.

- **You should receive compression therapy**, which means wearing special bandages or garments designed to support your veins and increase circulation in your legs. Compression therapy can be used to prevent an ulcer or to treat and heal an ulcer if you already have one. You should talk to your health care provider to see if compression therapy is right for you.

- **To help your wound heal**, you should have:
  - Dead skin, callus, and debris removed (this is called debridement)
  - Treatment with antibiotics if your wound is infected
  - A dressing that keeps the wound moist
• You also should be offered a medication called pentoxifylline, which can help heal your leg ulcer. You should talk to your health care professional to see if this medication is right for you. You should still have compression therapy while you take this medication.

• If you have a leg ulcer that is unusual or not healing as quickly as it should, you should be referred to a specialist for further assessment and treatment.

• You should receive care from a team of health care professionals who have been trained to care for people who have developed or are at risk of developing a venous or mixed venous/arterial leg ulcer.

• When you change health care settings (for example, you return home after being cared for in a hospital), your health care team or health care professional should work with you to make sure that important information is transferred with you, and that you are connected to the supports you need.

Everybody is different, and some recommendations may not apply in your situation. If you have questions about your care, it is important to speak with your health care professional.

A more detailed version of this quality standard is available for health care professionals so they can stay current on the newest best evidence. This detailed version is also available to members of the public and can be found on our website.

Please see the complete quality standard at www.hqontario.ca and contact us at qualitystandards@hqontario.ca if you have any questions or feedback about this guide.
About Health Quality Ontario

Health Quality Ontario is the provincial advisor on the quality of health care. We are motivated by a single-minded purpose: Better health for all Ontarians.

Our quality standards are concise sets of statements outlining the best possible care for patients based on the best available evidence. They are developed in collaboration with clinical experts from across the province and patients and caregivers with lived experience with the condition being discussed.

For more information about Health Quality Ontario and our quality standards, visit: www.hqontario.ca.

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