Compression Stockings

Compression stockings are support stockings that help control swelling in feet, ankles or lower legs. The swelling is caused by a build-up of fluid in the tissue. You may hear the term edema by your health care provider.

There are different compression pressures for stockings. Use the pressure level ordered by your doctor. Many require a prescription, but some can be purchased at a pharmacy or medical supply store. Ask the pharmacist if you need help getting the right strength.

It is important to prevent fluid build-up or edema because it can:

- Cause pain in the leg or foot
- Prevent blood from circulating to the skin surface
- Prevent wounds from healing

Wear compression stockings as soon as you get up

Put on your stocking before getting out of bed in the morning. This stops swelling before it starts. Here are more tips for using stockings correctly:

- Wear stockings all day long.
- Remove at bedtime before taking a bath or shower. You should bathe or shower right after removing the stockings.
- Sleep with your feet elevated higher than your heart to prevent swelling at night.
Putting on and taking off stockings

Stockings are made from special fabric fibers. To avoid damage, remove jewelry that can cause a hole or snag before putting them on.

1. Place the stocking on your foot, gently working it over the heel.
2. Gently pull the stocking up your leg. Do not pull or tug or this can cause a hole or run in the fabric. Smooth out wrinkles or folds to prevent skin irritation.

   Rubber kitchen gloves can help you grip stockings at the fingertips if you have trouble pulling it up your leg.

3. Gently roll the stocking down the leg to the heel. Slide it off and around the ankle and foot.

How to care for your stockings

- Follow the care instructions for washing. Most can be washed in a washing machine. Use the gentle cycle and a mild detergent.
- To dry, lay flat on a towel to protect the shape of the stocking.
- Do not use petroleum based products, such as Vaseline. These products can damage stocking fibers.
- Compression stockings last about 6 months.

When to Contact Your Doctor

If you have any of these signs, contact your doctor:

- Numbness or tingling that is not normal
- Pain or an increase in pain
- Changes in the color or temperature in your toes or feet
- New wounds develop

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.