

CARING FOR LOWER EXTREMITY WOUNDS AND CELLULITIS



Despite the most careful wound care, some complications may occur, especially if the person has diabetes or another condition that slows healing. This video demonstrates how to manage one of the most frequent complications—swelling (edema) that is caused by the buildup of fluid leaking from small blood vessels.

Keeping the feet elevated whenever possible is important. Wearing compression stockings and wraps is also a good way to keep the swelling from getting worse.

Supplies

- > Silicone spray to clean the wound (you can also use warm water and mild soap)
- > Ribbon gauze (1/4 inch gauze to pack a deep wound)
- > 4X4 inch gauze pads to cover the wound
- > Tape or silicone dressing to keep the dressing in place
 - Silicone dressing is easier to remove because it doesn't stick to the skin
- > Disposable gloves
- > Towel to support the person's foot and leg and keep the surface clean
- > Zipper-lock plastic bags for disposal of treatment materials
 - Don't put used materials directly in garbage
- > Compression stockings and wraps
 - It's a good idea to have two sets of compression stockings and socks so that one can be washed and dried while the other is worn

Costs

In general, insurance coverage, including Medicare, does not include compression stockings and wraps. Your family member's specific condition may be covered, however. The other supplies are disposable and are generally not covered by insurance, but it's a good idea to check.

Steps in Treatment

1. Wash your hands thoroughly
2. Put on a fresh pair of disposable gloves
3. If there is an old dressing, remove it carefully
4. Place it in the zipper-lock plastic bag for disposal

5. Cleanse the wound with mild soap and water or saline spray and pat dry
6. Remove your gloves and place in the disposal bag
7. Wash your hands again
8. Put on a fresh pair of disposable gloves
9. Apply a clean 4X4 inch gauze pad
10. Use tape or silicone dressing to keep the gauze in place
11. Remove your gloves and place in the disposal bag
12. Make sure all materials are in the disposal bag
13. Wash hands again
14. Put on the compression stocking, rolling it up to protect the leg
15. Put on the compression wrap and close with Velcro strips
16. Put on compression sock
 - Compression stockings should be snug but comfortable. You may need help in choosing the right fit.

Signs of Infection

When changing the dressing, make sure you look for any signs of infection. These include:

- > Redness
- > Swelling
- > Change in drainage
- > Fever
- > Chills
- > Increased pain

If any of these occurs, and especially if you observe more than one, contact your health care professional immediately.

Preventing Recurrence of Foot Wounds

- > Early detection is important. In addition to checking the person's feet when changing a dressing, which may happen only every 3 to 5 days, it is important to check the feet every day, whether there is a wound or not. Look for blisters or sores, bruises or cuts, or dry or cracked skin. Check between the toes as well as the tops and bottoms of the feet.
- > Wash the person's feet every day with lukewarm water and mild soap.
- > Gently pat dry, especially between the toes where infection can occur.
- > Trim the person's toenails or arrange to have this done by a podiatrist (a foot doctor).
- > Make sure the person wears socks and shoes at all times. Always check the insides of shoes to identify rough spots and to remove items that can cause injury.
- > Keeping the feet elevated for part of the day is important, but so is keeping active.

Other Resources

- > MedlinePlus, a website of the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. National Library of Medicine, has helpful information on buying, using, and taking care of [compression stockings](#).
- > [“Compression Stockings: How to Use Them”](#) from WebMD gives instructions on putting on the stockings and other aspects of their use.
- > For veterans and caregivers of veterans, go to www.caregiver.va.gov or call 1-855-260-3274 for more information about resources and support.

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