PATIENTS COMMUNITY
PRACTICE AND DISTRICT NURSES
LEG CLUB®
www.legclub.org

Tips for healthier legs

Prevention is about helping people stay healthy, happy and independent for as long as possible. The aim of this 'Tips' is to provide a brief overview of the importance of looking after your legs.

The human body, which is perfectly designed for walking, running and moving by activating all its parts, must now adapt to being seated, sometimes for prolonged periods, in a posture that is far from ideal. However, since we have evolved to walk upright which means that gravity is constantly forcing blood away from the heart and back into our legs.

Blood flow around the body is vital to our health, and legs play a vital role in that process as the calf muscle is instrumental in helping to pump blood back to the heart from the legs. If normal blood flow through the valves within the deep veins in your legs becomes ineffective through injury or inactivity, the blood may be redirected to the superficial veins. These are situated near the surface of the skin, causing various complaints such as spider veins, varicose veins and to more serious complaints such as leg ulcers.

Early intervention is important, and we should be looking after our legs to prevent damage in later life. Especially, as around half of us are likely to get some form of venous disease during our lifetime. Venous insufficiency is described as abnormal blood flow through veins that can cause local damage to affected legs. The symptoms of venous insufficiency can include throbbing, cramping, burning sensations, and leg fatigue. Skin changes can occur and affected areas can become thin, shiny, discoloured (blue purple), and atrophic (areas of pale white scar like tissue that break down easily to minor knocks which can turn into ulcers that can be difficult to heal without proper medical attention).

Here are five tips to keep your legs healthy

STOP SMOKING

Smoking increases the hardening of the arteries by about ten times. It also causes the smaller arteries to close up. Although it is hard to stop smoking support can be found through your doctor, practice nurse or pharmacist who can suggest nicotine substitutes, as well as help lines and booklets.

KEEP MOVING

Make sure every day includes regular exercise which will help to strengthen the muscles of your legs and improves your blood circulation. Here are some simple exercises:

- right heel on floor – move your foot left to right ten times
- left heel on floor – move your foot left to right ten times
- both heels on floor – move your feet left to right ten times
- right heel on floor – lift left leg up and down to knee height ten times
- left heel on floor – lift right leg up and down to knee height ten times
- stand up and sit down ten times

TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOUR FEET

Make sure shoes fit correctly and are not too small, ask your doctor to refer you to a podiatrist (a specialist in looking after feet) for regular check-ups especially if you have diabetes. Also, by wearing comfortable shoes this will help reduce the strain on your legs.

TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOUR SKIN

Look after your skin by avoiding extremes of temperature, avoid scratching, and trauma. Be aware of the importance of taking daily care of your skin with the use of simple moisturisers onto the lower legs is a simple but effective way of preventing damage.

KEEP YOUR WEIGHT UNDER CONTROL

Being overweight can increase your risk of developing varicose veins as it puts pressure on the valves of the veins, causing wear and tear. Also, extra weight also puts strain on the joints, especially those in the knees and hips, and is a risk factor for heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

Further information available

www.legclub.org/uploads/files/documents/Leg%20Club%20Common%20Foot%20Problems.pdf

www.legclub.org/download/documents/539

www.legclub.org/uploads/files/documents/Leg%20Club%20Thread%20Veins.pdf

www.legsmatter.org

www.nhs.uk/conditions/leg-ulcer/prevention

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