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You are entitled to a copy of any letter we write about you. Please ask if you want one when you come to the hospital.

If you are unhappy with the advice you have been given by your GP, consultant, or another healthcare professional, you may ask for a second (or further) opinion.

The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: patient-information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

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Leg ulcers (for people with poor circulation or arterial disease) (page 1 of 2)

This leaflet should be read along with advice given by your doctor or nurse.

An ulcer occurs where an area of skin breaks down and you can see the tissue underneath. There are many causes of leg ulcers but most leg ulcers are caused by varicose veins (another leaflet deals with this problem).

Other causes of some leg ulcers, or reasons why their healing is hampered, is poor circulation due to narrowed, or furred-up arteries in the leg (arterial disease), problems with the nerves that supply the skin, or other health problems such as arthritis.

Compression bandages are not usually prescribed for ulcers if the blood supply to the leg is reduced. However, after assessing you the nurse may advise light compression at a level which is suitable for your particular condition.

We may advise that treatment to open up the arteries with a small balloon (angioplasty) is necessary to improve the blood supply and so help the ulcer to heal (a leaflet that explains this is available).

Sometimes we may advise surgery for varicose veins (a leaflet that explains this is available).

What causes arterial disease?

Arterial disease and furring-up of arteries are caused by:

- smoking
- high blood pressure
- high cholesterol
- diabetes
- lack of exercise.

What can I do to help myself?

There is a lot you can do to help your condition.

Stop smoking, If you are a smoker you should make serious efforts to stop. Stopping smoking is the single most effective way to improve your health. The chemicals in cigarettes interfere with healing and will further hamper your circulation. Smokers are also much more likely to have a heart attack and/or stroke.

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Eat well. Your diet is important to help the ulcer heal and prevent further furring up of the arteries. Aim to eat a diet rich in protein as well as plenty of fruit and vegetables. Cut down on sugary foods and animal fats, such as full-fat dairy products and fats around meat. Oily fish is a good source of protein (see the leaflet 'Eating for a Healthy Heart' for more information).

If you are overweight try to lose weight by eating a healthy diet and avoiding fatty foods, sweets and biscuits.

Exercise. Exercise is important for your circulation. If you are able to walk, aim for at least a half hour walk every day as well as doing ankle exercises. If you are not able to walk, ankle exercises are advised.

- Rotate your ankle in a circular motion for a few minutes every hour.
- Stand holding on to the back of a chair, lift your heels off the floor, lower yourself and repeat this as many times as you can.

Rest with your legs up. Rest with your legs up above hip level. This helps prevent the leg swelling which is what will stop your ulcer healing. If you are on your feet a lot, you should try to sit down for a while in the middle of the day with your legs up above hip level. Three or four times a day for about 30 minutes each time, try to lie down with your leg raised.

Skin care. Avoid damaging the skin on your legs and feet. Do not walk around your house without slippers or shoes. It is important to take good care of your skin and to use the creams given to you by your doctor or nurse.

If your circulation is poor, a podiatrist should cut your toenails to make sure your toes are not damaged accidentally. Your doctor will refer you.

Medications

If appropriate your doctor may advise you to take medications to help control blood pressure, cholesterol and to thin the blood. This will help prevent your condition getting worse, so it is important that you take all your prescribed medicines.

Further information

The NHS smoking quit line is 0800 022 4 332 or you can log on to their website for further information: [smokefree.nhs.uk](https://www.smokefree.nhs.uk)