

Anti-Embolism Stockings: A Patient's Guide

What are anti-embolism stockings?

These are stockings made with firm elastic that give graduated compression to the leg. Most are below the knee but occasionally some are full thigh length. Anti-embolism stockings help reduce the risk of blood clots or deep vein thrombosis (DVT) forming in your legs whilst you are in hospital and less active than normal.

How do anti-embolism stockings work?

The stockings squeeze your feet, lower legs and thighs, helping your blood to circulate around your legs more quickly. This makes blood clotting less likely.

How long will I need to wear them?

It is important to wear the stockings for as much of the time as possible, day and night, whether in hospital or afterwards at home, until you are back to your usual level of activity.

How do I put on the stockings?

1. Put your hand into the stocking as far as the heel.
2. Hold the heel and turn the stocking inside out as far as possible.
3. Put the stocking over foot and heel. The centre of your heel should be over the heel pocket of the stocking.
4. Pull the stocking up and fit it around your ankle and calf.
5. Smooth out any spare material making sure the heel is in the heel pocket.
6. The open toe area should be located under your toes.

Are there any pitfalls to avoid or problems to look out for?

- Don't roll the stockings down, as they will form a tight band around your leg. This can be dangerous as it constricts the blood flow and can cause skin sores.
- The stockings should be taken off once a day (for no more than 30 min) for hygiene purposes and to check the condition of your skin.
- If you develop pain or discomfort, bruising or blisters or areas where your skin has changed colour you should stop using the stockings and seek immediate advice from your doctor or nurse.
- Be alert to numbness, pins and needles, pain or soreness in the foot or leg. This will be a sign that the stockings are too tight.
- If a rash develops you may have an allergy to the elastic fibres in the stockings.
- Non slip foot wear should be worn.

How do I look after my stockings?

If your doctor or nurse has told you to carry on wearing your stockings at home remember to:

- Put on clean stockings at least every 3 days (or earlier if soiled).
- Wash stockings by hand or in a machine at no more than 75°C and do not use bleach.
- Spin or air dry but do not tumble dry or iron them, as this will damage the elastic. Do not put the stockings on when they are wet.
- Avoid using greasy ointments, oils and lanolin on your skin as this damages the stockings' elastic fibres.

People who should not be offered anti-embolism stockings

You should not be offered anti-embolism stockings if:

- you have recently had a stroke
- you have peripheral arterial disease (narrowing of the arteries leading to your legs)
- peripheral neuropathy (damage to the sensory nerves)
- gangrene
- a recent skin graft
- eczema or fragile skin on your legs
- fluid on the lungs caused by heart failure
- you have an allergy to the stocking material
- your legs are very swollen
- a good stocking fit cannot be achieved

References and further information:

If you have any further queries about your anti-embolism stockings, please ask your doctor or nurse.

Contact the VTE clinic on: **01603 287809** (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm) for further information.

Venous thromboembolism in over 16s: reducing the risk of hospital-acquired deep vein thrombosis or pulmonary embolism
NICE guideline Published: March 2018

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng89>