Wearing anti-embolism stockings to prevent blood clots

What are anti-embolism stockings?
Anti-embolism stockings reduce the threat of blood clots forming in your legs whilst you are in hospital and less active than normal. Your doctor recognises this is a potential problem and has prescribed the stockings as a preventative measure to guard you against this risk. Anti-embolism stockings improve blood circulation in the leg veins during periods of inactivity. They should be worn throughout your hospital stay.

How do anti-embolism stockings work?
- The stockings squeeze your leg from the ankle to the knee, helping the blood to circulate more quickly. This makes blood clotting less likely.
- The stockings prevent blood clots from forming in patients who have had surgery or are taking certain medicines.

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. Insert your hand into the stocking as far as the heel pocket.
2. Grab the centre of the heel pocket and turn the stocking inside out as far as the heel area.
3. Put the stocking over your 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. Make sure the heel and toe are positioned correctly.
6. Smooth out any excess material between the top of the stocking and your ankle.
7. Pull the toe section forward to smooth the ankle and instep and make your toes more comfortable.
8. The top of the stocking should be below your knee cap.

What can I do to help myself?
- You must report any new pain or discomfort in your feet, legs or skin caused by the stockings.
- If you notice itching or a rash, you may be allergic to the elastic fibres in the stockings. If this happens, let your doctor know or ring the department where you were given the stockings.
- Do not roll your stockings down.
- Take your stockings off once a day to check the condition of your skin and to wash your feet and legs.
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 three days (or earlier if the stockings are dirty). Contact the ward you were staying on if you need new stockings after you have gone home.
- wash stockings by hand, or in a machine at no more than 40° centigrade, and do not use bleach.
- spin or air dry your stockings, but do not tumble dry or iron them.
- avoid using greasy ointments, oils and lanolin on your skin while wearing anti-embolism stockings (including before and after they are put on), as this could break down the stocking fibres and reduce their effectiveness.
- only use the stockings yourself, as the correct size is given to you depending on your leg measurement. The stockings should not be passed on to family members or friends.

Can all patients wear 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)
- you have peripheral neuropathy (damage to the sensory nerves)
- you have gangrene
- you recently had a skin graft
- you have eczema or fragile skin on your legs
- you have an allergy to the stocking material
- you have fluid on your lungs caused by heart failure
- your legs are very swollen
- a good stocking fit cannot be achieved.

Please tell a doctor or nurse caring for you if you think that any of the above may apply to you.

Contact us
If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the eye day case unit at St Thomas’ hospital on 020 7188 6564 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm and 9am to 12 noon on Saturdays).

Out of hours, please contact the hospital switchboard on 020 7188 7188 and ask for the bleep desk. Ask the bleep operator to bleep the eye doctor on call and wait for a response. This will connect you directly to the on call eye doctor.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)
To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust’s services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:
t: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas’  t: 020 7188 8803 at Guy’s  e: pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Language support services
If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.
t: 020 7188 8815  fax: 020 7188 5953

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