

LEAKY LEGS TERMINOLOGY: GLOSSARY OF USEFUL WOUND CARE TERMS

Cellulitis	A bacterial infection underneath the skin. Symptoms include swelling, pain, warmth, and severe redness. Cellulitis normally affects the lower legs, but it can also occur on the face and arms where there is a break in the skin. Cellulitis can be treated with antibiotics. If left untreated, the infection can spread into the lymph nodes and bloodstream, which can be life-threatening.
Chronic Oedema	Is a general term used to describe the existence of swelling within the tissues of the body. It is caused by an excess of fluid that has been present for at least three months and is not relieved by elevation or diuretics. Chronic oedema is most associated with problems in the venous and lymphatic systems.
Chronic Venous Insufficiency	Chronic venous insufficiency (CVI) happens when the veins in the lower extremities do not allow blood to flow back up to the heart. This can lead to blood pooling in the legs. CVI can cause swelling, pain, cramps, varicose veins, and leg ulcers.
Compression Therapy	Compression therapy improves blood flow through the veins by applying pressure to the lower leg. It can be done by bandaging the lower leg or wearing compression clothing (e.g. socks, tights, or stockings). Compression bandaging requires skill and should only be performed by a qualified healthcare professional. Compression therapy is extremely effective at minimising oedema. It is also very useful in wound and ulcer prevention.
Diuretics	Diuretics are drugs that increase the flow of urine. They promote the removal of excess water, salts, and toxins from the body.
Infection	A reaction caused by microorganisms such as bacteria or viruses invading the body.

Doppler Ultrasound	A Doppler ultrasound is a non-invasive test that can be used to estimate the blood flow through your blood vessels by bouncing high-frequency sound waves. This treatment is required before undertaking compression therapy.
Exudate	This is a fluid that oozes out of cuts, areas of infection, and inflammation. Exudate is made up of water, electrolytes, proteins, enzymes, and nutrients. It is sometimes called pus.
Hyperkeratosis	Hyperkeratosis is the abnormal thickening of the outer layer of skin, known as the stratum corneum. This is the result of an atypical quantity of keratin-producing cells. Hyperkeratosis is localised to the lower legs and feet, which is why it usually affects patients with lymphoedema and chronic venous insufficiency.
Leg Ulcer	A leg ulcer is a wound in the leg that takes more than 4 to 6 weeks to heal. Leg ulcers can vary in severity from person to person and typically occur as a consequence of comorbidities such as Chronic Venous Insufficiency or Lymphatic Insufficiency.
Lipoedema	Lipoedema is a chronic condition that involves an abnormal accumulation of fat cells in the legs, buttocks, and thighs. Lipoedema can affect the arms, but this is less common. Unlike normal weight gain, lipoedema can feel painful and heavy. It can also bruise easily. Lipoedema overwhelmingly affects women.
Lymphatic System	The lymphatic system is a part of the body's immune system and plays an important role in protecting the body from infection. The lymphatic system is an extensive network of vessels, nodes, and ducts that collect and circulate excess fluid in the body. The lymphatic system regulates fluid balance, the absorption of fatty acids in the stomach, and the elimination of dangerous cells like bacteria.
Maceration	Maceration is the softening and breaking down of the skin because of prolonged exposure to moisture.

Lymphoedema	<p>Lymphoedema is a chronic condition that results in the swelling of the body's tissues. Although it can occur anywhere in the body, it typically starts in the arms or legs. Lymphoedema occurs when the lymphatic system stops working properly.</p> <p>Besides swelling, other symptoms include heaviness, difficulty moving, skin infections, folds in the skin, and leakage of fluid through the skin.</p>
Oedema	<p>Oedema is an accumulation of fluid in the tissues of the body. The swelling usually occurs in one part of the body at a time (e.g. the legs or ankles). However, it can be distributed more evenly around the body, depending on the cause.</p>
Venous Leg Ulcer	<p>Venous leg ulcers are open and painful sores that generally develop on the inside of the leg, just above the ankle. The most common causes of venous leg ulcers are Chronic Venous Insufficiency (CVI) and Arterial Insufficiency. Venous leg ulcers generally take more than 4 weeks to heal.</p> <p>They are the most common type of leg ulcer, accounting for more than 60% of all cases.[1]</p> <p>Symptoms include discolouration, oedema, heaviness in the legs, itchy skin, and a foul-smelling discharge.</p>
Varicose Veins	<p>Varicose veins are swollen and enlarged veins that typically occur on the legs and feet. They are often blue and purple in colour, and lumpy and bulging in appearance.</p> <p>Other non-visible symptoms include aching legs, swollen feet and ankles, and muscle cramps.</p> <p>They are usually the result of some degree of venous insufficiency.</p>

References:

1. *Venous leg ulcer - NHS (www.nhs.uk)*

Find out more at www.richardsonhealthcare.com