

Graduated compression stockings

Medical compression hosiery (stockings) is a medical treatment used for problems with the veins, to prevent hospital-acquired thrombosis and to manage the symptoms of post-thrombotic syndrome. Obviously they will only help if you use them. And often people choose not to use them because they:

- are the wrong type of stocking;
- are either too tight or too loose;
- are too big or too small and do not fit well;
- are not easy to get on;
- are not comfortable;
- look ugly; or
- don't fit your personal needs.

Types of stockings

Approved medical compression stockings meet demanding technical specifications and are the result of a manufacturing process aimed at guaranteeing that you receive the appropriate treatment. Medical stockings have:

- a certain level of compression (pressure) at the ankle;
- graduated compression (less at the top of the stocking);
- They keep their pressure up over the lifetime of the stocking - they don't get saggy!

It is important to remember that the level of compression is directly linked to your measurements. Because of this, it is important that you are measured by a qualified professional to make sure the stocking fits correctly.

Medical compression stockings are often confused with **support stockings and flight socks**. These do not meet any technical specifications, can stop the blood from flowing because of inverted compression, usually do not need to be measured and can be very uncomfortable.

Classes of compression

Currently in the UK, the most common classes of compression offered by manufacturers are as follows.

Compression Class (mmHG)	UK	Germany	France	US
1	14 - 17	18 - 21	10 - 15	8 - 15
2	18 - 24	23 - 32	15 - 20	15 - 20
3	25 - 35	36 - 46	30 - 36	20 - 30
4	Does not apply	More than 36	More than 36	30 - 40

You can see from these classes that compression level 3 can be anything from 25mmHg (a unit measuring pressure) in the UK to 46mmHg in Germany. It is better to measure compression according to the amount of compression in millimetres of mercury and most guidelines recommend 20mmHg compression at the ankle to prevent hospital-acquired thrombosis. These type of stockings would also relieve the symptoms of:

- varicose veins;
- reversible swelling; and
- swelling and discomfort in pregnancy.

Strong compression stockings with compression of 20-36mmHg are excellent for:

- severe venous insufficiency;
- varicose eczema;
- post-rheumatic or post-thrombotic syndrome;
- permanent swelling; and
- swelling before and after vein stripping (where veins are removed) and sclerotherapy

Strong compression stockings are also recommended in patients who have a lot of swelling immediately after a deep-vein thrombosis and in patients with lymphodema (a build-up of fluid).

Very strong compression stockings of more than 36mmHg are only used for those with:

- severe venous insufficiency;
- venous stasis ulcers;
- severe post-thrombotic syndrome; and
- severe lymphodema.

The important measurement for the stockings is around the ankle.

Measuring and fitting

Proper measurement and fitting is absolutely vital. You should only be measured by trained professionals who, when fitting or choosing the stockings, will take account of your needs.

How easy they are to use

If you cannot put your stockings on, obviously you will not benefit. Modern technology, especially with the introduction of new yarns into graduated compression stockings, allows manufacturers to produce stockings that are much easier to put on while still having the necessary level of compression for medical treatment.

Comfort

Comfort is absolutely fundamental. If the stockings are not comfortable, you are not going to wear them all day. Modern technology allows manufacturers to produce stockings that can be comfortable.

Your needs

There are two specific things to consider - firstly your shape, and secondly your lifestyle.

Shape: Men tend to have larger feet, wider calves and thinner thighs than women. Some manufacturers deal with this by providing graduated compression stockings that take this into account, rather than providing a unisex product which would have implications for fit and comfort for both men and women.

Lifestyle: Everyone has different needs in terms of their jobs, how active they are and the clothing they may need to wear.

When not to use stockings

You should not wear compression stockings if you have:

- advanced peripheral arterial disease;
- congested heart failure;
- infected phlebitis;
- have oozing skin rash;
- an allergy to the material they are made from; if so try another make of stocking
- loss of feeling in the legs such as peripheral neuropathy due to conditions such as diabetes

If you are considering stockings, please speak to your doctor to make sure that there are no reasons for you not to wear them.



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For more information on how to help us, write to:

Thrombosis UK
PO Box 58, Llanwrda
Carmarthenshire
SA19 0AD

Phone: 0300 772 9603
email: admin@thrombosisuk.org
or visit our website at www.thrombosisuk.org

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