

Veins under PRESSURE

SLOW-HEALING WOUNDS CAUSED BY PRESSURE FROM POOLED BLOOD ARE THE MOST COMMON REASON PATIENTS SEEK THE EXPERTISE OF SPECIALISTS AT THE HSHS ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPITAL CENTER FOR WOUND CARE AND HYPERBARIC MEDICINE.

DAMAGED OR WEAK VEINS in the leg can cause blood to linger instead of traveling back to the heart. Pressure from this pooled blood sometimes leads to serious, slow-healing wounds called venous skin ulcers.

"These ulcers represent a serious health concern for patients, and they shouldn't be ignored," says Brian Pauley, MD, Medical Director of the HSHS St. Joseph's Center for Wound Care and Hyperbaric Medicine. "Untreated, they can become infected and lead to amputation or even loss of life."

WINTER CARE

As the temperature drops, your body may have a harder time keeping your veins open wide enough to pump blood throughout the body, making it more difficult for ulcers to heal. Blood plays an important role in healing wounds, as it carries oxygen and nutrients to promote healing.

To ward off circulation problems, Dr. Pauley recommends wearing compression stockings—tight garments that apply pressure to the leg, encouraging blood flow—staying warm, and getting up and moving regularly.

"For many of us during the winter, the impulse is to stay inside and stay still because it is so cold and gray," Dr. Pauley says.

Stimulating your leg muscles encourages circulation, while being still for too long can cause blood to collect.

"Don't put off going to the doctor if you see something questionable happening to your legs," Dr. Pauley says. "Venous skin ulcers complications can happen very fast."

➤ To make an appointment at the HSHS St. Joseph's Center for Wound Care and Hyperbaric Medicine, call 715.717.7657 (Chippewa location) or 715.717.4395 (Eau Claire location).

Screening Questionnaire

- Have you ever had a sore or injury that took more than two weeks to heal?
- Do you have swelling in your legs that causes changes in your daily activities?
- Do you have weeping blisters or open sores that cause changes in your daily activities?
- Do you have numbness, tingling, pins and needles, or itching sensations in your feet?
- Do your lower legs hurt if you walk a short distance?
- Is the skin on your feet dry and cracked or does your lower leg skin look scaly?
- Have you ever had side effects from radiation therapy, such as nonhealing skin wounds, dry mouth, bad teeth, or painful swallowing?
- Have you had significant hearing loss in one of your ears in the past three months?
- Have you had stitches or skin staples that failed and resulted in an open wound?
- Does your chair, bed, or wheelchair cause sores?
- Do you have a bone infection that has lasted longer than six weeks?

If you answer "yes" to any of the preceding questions, you may benefit from an appointment with a wound care specialist.