

# WHY LEGS MATTER



**LEGS  
MATTER!**

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Non-healing wounds of the leg and foot are one of the UK's biggest health challenges. Despite this, conditions of the leg and foot do not currently receive the care or attention they urgently need.

Every day, thousands of people's quality of life is devastated by the lack of support and advice on the prevention of lower leg and foot conditions and the failure to correctly diagnosis and treat them.

**This can and must change.**

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# The scale of the challenge

Nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  million people in the UK have lower limb ulcers. It cost the NHS around £600 million every year to manage these conditions (Healthcare Commission, 2004), with the majority of this being spent in primary care. An ageing population means this figure is only going to increase. Worse still, people with leg ulcers don't always get the right care, leading to increased costs and elongated healing rates (Atkin & Tickle, 2016).

## At a glance

- The NHS treats more than **2.2 million wounds** annually – that's **4.5% of adult population** (Guest et al., 2015).
- The total cost of managing these wounds and associated issues is calculated to be **£5.3 billion annually** (Guest et al., 2015).
- Wound care products accounted for only 14% of the overall cost of managing wounds. (Guest et al., 2017).
- Non-healing or delayed healing was a major factor in increasing costs.
- Less than half of patients with leg ulcers had healed within a 1-year study period

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## An unnecessary suffering

**"It's the sort of pain where all you can do is cry because there's nothing you can do about it."**

Leg ulcers can devastate lives, causing often unbearable pain and forcing people to adjust their entire lives around their leg ulceration. Several studies have shown the impact of leg ulcers on people's quality of life including mobility, anxiety and depression (Green et al., 2014, Franks et al., 2003, Charles, 2004, Persoon et al., 2004, Jones et al., 2006).

The impact leg ulcers have on patients' families, careers and mental health was powerfully articulated in a number of patient stories shared as part of Legs Matter Week 2019 with one patient likening the pain of her leg ulcer to being "attacked by a lion", another reflecting that she had spent over a decade virtually housebound by her ulcers.

## More than ulcers

Ulcers are just one of the conditions that affect the leg and foot. The Legs Matter campaign also shines a light on the other overlooked conditions of the leg and foot – peripheral arterial disease, chronic oedema / lymphoedema and diabetic foot ulcerations.

**"You never stop thinking about it. When it's bad you can't sleep. I was ringing my doctor sobbing. Neuropathic pain is unbearable and nothing touches it. It's just the worst pain and nobody talks about it."**

**Legs Matter Supporter**

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## Peripheral arterial disease (PAD)

### **The largest single cause of lower limb amputation in the United Kingdom (NICE, 2014)**

PAD is largest single cause of lower limb amputation in the United Kingdom. It is common and is associated with increased morbidity and mortality, yet it often remains undiagnosed exposing patients to increased risk and inappropriate management. The most common symptom of PAD is leg pain while walking, known as intermittent claudication (IC) but symptoms can progress to arterial rest pain or even tissue loss. Risk factors for developing PAD are identical to that of cardiovascular disease. Indeed, patients with PAD are much more likely to die from heart attacks or strokes than they are from PAD itself. Early identification and appropriate risk management of this condition is critical.

## Chronic oedema

### **Over 100,000 people affected**

Chronic oedema affects over 100,000 people in the United Kingdom (Lewis & Morgan, 2008) – a figure that's increasing year-on-year as a result of an aging population and rising obesity rates. Oedema in isolation is frequently recognised but often not treated (Atkin, 2014). A cornerstone to the management of oedema is compression therapy, which is known to reduce oedema in a number of ways. But many patients are not treated with compression therapy due to unwarranted variation in care and national discrepancy of access/commissioning of specialist lymphoedema services (Guest et al., 2015).

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## Diabetic foot ulceration

### A cost of £650 million

The impact of diabetic foot disease on people with diabetes is profound and is associated with disability, amputation and premature death (National Diabetes Foot Care Audit Report, 2016). Diabetic foot ulceration (DFU) is common in people with diabetes, with around 10% of this group having a foot ulceration at some point in their lifetime. There are significant costs to the NHS in caring for patients with DFU, with annual costs estimated at £650 million – equating to £1 in every £150 spent by the NHS (Kerr, 2012). Delayed healing is a common factor, with one study showing that only 35% of patients with DFU will heal within a 12-month period (Guest, Fuller, & Vowden, 2017).

## Reshaping care together

The scale and severity of the challenge is clear. Now is the time for urgent action to create the change that's needed in the understating and treatment of lower leg and foot conditions.

Legs Matter is a coalition of healthcare organisations that have come together to make sure that anyone with a lower leg or foot problem understands their condition and gets the urgent care, attention and support they need.

### We're doing this by:

- Increasing awareness of lower leg and foot conditions among the public
- Encouraging healthcare professionals to be aware of the signs, seriousness and implications of lower leg and foot conditions
- Empowering specialist lower leg and foot healthcare professionals to deliver and champion better lower leg and foot care
- Working with commissioners and influencers to reshape lower leg and foot care within the UK.

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A GREAT  
**BIG WEEK**  
FOR LEGS & FEET  
03-07 JUNE 2019



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