

Having a Doppler ultrasound scan: common questions

What is a Doppler ultrasound scan? (usually just called a Doppler)

The Doppler is a small machine that is used to measure the blood supply to the legs. The Doppler test is usually done before compression bandages or stockings are prescribed for your legs. It is a safety check and is similar to having your blood pressure taken. Blood pressure is also measured in your arms and ankles and the two readings are compared. It will not be painful but you may feel the cuff becoming tight around your arm and ankles as the reading is measured. If you are concerned about this, please discuss it with your nurse.

Where will the Doppler test be done?

It may be done in a health clinic, doctor's surgery, at home or in a hospital clinic. The test is usually carried out by a nurse. Sometimes it may be done by a doctor or at the hospital by a technician.

What do I need to do to prepare for the test?

There is very little preparation needed but you may be asked to wear something with short or loose sleeves. If you wear trousers it is useful if the legs can be rolled up. You may eat and drink normally before the test. Just before the test you will be asked to remove your socks/stockings and shoes.

How long will it take?

The actual Doppler test may only take 30 minutes but you must allow at least an hour so that there is time for you to rest before your blood pressure is recorded.

What will happen?

You will be asked to lie down and rest for about 20 minutes so your blood pressure settles. During this time you may be asked questions about your health. It may be a good idea to visit the toilet first to ensure you are comfortable.

You will then have a blood pressure cuff applied to your arm. Instead of using a stethoscope the Doppler sensor/probe is used to listen to your blood flow. To allow the sensor/probe to pick up a signal a small amount of gel is used on your skin. When the pressure is being measured you will be able to hear the sound of your blood as it moves through the vessels. If you would prefer not to hear this just mention this to the person performing the test. The pressure is measured in both arms.

The pressure is then measured in both legs. The blood pressure cuff is then applied around your ankles and the sensor/probe and gel is used in the same way. You may only have problems with one leg, but it is important that the blood flow in both legs is checked.

The Tissue Viability/Leg Ulcer Team has developed this leaflet with acknowledgement to the Leg Ulcer Forum:



The leaflet provides general advice but does not cover all cases. If you have any concerns, please discuss them with members of staff; or alternatively you can contact NHS Direct (0845 4647).

Useful numbers

Main hospital switchboard: 020-7794 0500

Appliances: (020-7794 0500) ext. 34513

Dermatology: (020-7794 0500) ext. 33508

Podiatry: (020-7794 0500) ext. 33554

Tissue viability service: (020-7794 0500) ext. 33882

Transport office: (020-7794 0500) ext. 31472

Vascular studies: (020-7794 0500) ext. 33932

PALS (Patient Advice & Liaison Service): 020-7830 2174

Websites

www.legulcerforum.org

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

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www.royalfree.nhs.uk