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Medically reviewed by Angela M. Bell, MD, FACP — Written by Marjorie Hecht on October 24, 2019There are ways to improve circulation in your legs, no matter what your level of activity — even if you’re lying in bed. We look at specific moves that are useful and include non-exercise tips to help leg circulation. In this case, movement includes both what you’re able to do using your legs and passive range of motion actions that help.Any amount of walking is the number one recommendation for improving circulation. You can start small, taking short walks, even just 5 minutes a day. If you’re able to do more, increase your time or speed gradually.Studies indicate that even small increases in the amount of time you walk daily can have benefits.Here are three exercises you can do any time you’re lying down. They can be especially helpful if you’re on bed rest for any amount of time, such as after surgery, or for any other reason when it’s important to maintain circulation in your legs to prevent blood clots. Ankle pumpingLying on your back with your feet straight ahead, flex your foot to move your toes up 10 times.You can do this one foot at a time or both together.Repeat the ankle pumping at least once an hour.Knee bendsLying on your back with your feet straight ahead, move one knee up toward your chest and back down. Repeat 10 times.Repeat using your other leg.Repeat the knee bends at least once an hour.Leg liftsLying on your back with your legs straight ahead, bend one knee while keeping your foot flat.Keeping the other leg straight and “locked,” lift it up until your knees are at the same level.Bring the leg down slowly, in a controlled movement.Repeat 10 times.Repeat with your other leg.Build up to more repeats as you’re able.Start easy with ankle pumps and knee bends. Add in other strengthening exercises as you’re able to.A healthcare provider can help you to establish an appropriate routine for your condition.You can do these exercises anytime you’re sitting, whether at a desk, or riding in a car or airplane.Heel and toe raisesSeated with both feet on the floor in front of you, raise both heels and hold for 3 seconds.Repeat 10 or more times.Repeat the lifts, but this time raise the toes of both feet.You can vary this exercise by alternating a heel raise and toe raise in a steady rocking motion. Or raise the heel on one foot and the toes on the other foot at the same time.Ankle rotationSeated with both feet on the floor, lift one foot up slightly.Rotate the ankle clockwise 10 times and then counterclockwise 10 times.Repeat with the other foot.Calf stretchSitting down with both feet on the floor, stretch one leg out in front of you.Lift your toes toward you and bend your ankle.Hold the stretch for 3 seconds and lower your foot back to the floor.Repeat 10 times or more.Repeat with the other leg.You can also try this alternating one leg after the other.Strap or belt stretchYou can also get a calf stretch by manually stretching your leg using an exercise strap or any comfortable length of material like a towel or belt.Sit on the floor (or in bed) with your legs straight out in front of you.Loop a strap around the middle of one foot and hold the ends.Keeping your leg straight, pull the strap until you feel a stretch in your calf.Hold the stretch for about 30 seconds.Repeat three times, relaxing your foot in between stretches.Foam roller stretchThe same moves people do with a foam roller to reduce muscle tension and stretch muscles can also help with blood flow.While sitting on the ground, put a soft foam roller under your ankles and roll it under your calves.While sitting on the ground, put a soft roller under your thighs and roll it under your hamstrings. Alternatively, you can move a massage roller stick with your hands over the same areas of your legs while seated on the floor or in a chair. Avoid going over your joints or bony areas.Here are basic exercises you can do standing up or as a warm-up before other exercises. They’re also good ways to increase circulation when you take a break from sitting.Heel liftsHold onto a chair for balance.Raise your heels slowly so that you’re standing on tiptoes.Lower your heels slowly in a controlled movement.Repeat 10 times and work up to more repeats.Leg standsHold onto a chair for balance.Lift one foot, so that your weight is on one leg only.Hold the position for 10 seconds.Repeat, standing on the other leg.Gradually build up to holding the position for 30 seconds and then 60 seconds.If you can, increase the difficulty by holding onto the chair with one hand, then one finger, and finally without holding on at all. You can also try the leg stands with your eyes closed.SquatsStand with your feet about hip-width apart.Keeping your core tight, lower your body as much as is comfortable.Your weight should shift to your heels, your back should be flat, and your behind should extend out.Start out with a shallow squat and increase how far you squat down as you get stronger. Your knees shouldn’t move past your toes.Repeat a few times, increasing the number of repeats as you’re able to.Exercise ballStanding up near a wall, put the ball between the middle of your back and the wall. The ball helps protect your back.Slide down into a squat, keeping your back straight while pushing against the ball. Squat as low as you comfortably can.Push back up to your start position.Repeat 10 times.You can also do this sitting move with your back directly against the wall.Compression stockings can help to improve your blood flow, and to reduce swelling and pain. The compression comes from a special elastic fabric that’s designed to fit tightly over your lower legs and ankles or over your thighs and legs.A healthcare provider may recommend wearing compression stockings after surgery to prevent blood clots. They may also recommend compression stockings to help with varicose veins or venous insufficiency. Some people wear compression stockings to keep their legs more comfortable if they have a job where they stand a lot. Support pantyhose, either light or firm support, may also be useful. Compression stockings come in different levels of compression from mild to extra firm. They also come in different materials designs thicknessesheightsTalk with a healthcare provider about what type and height of compression stockings they recommend for your condition. You may need to experiment with several combinations to find the most comfortable and effective style for you. Some prescription strength compression stockings may be covered by your medical insurance, depending on the condition causing your poor circulation.Bed wedge or pillows. Elevating your legs while you sleep can help your circulation and prevent swelling. It’s best to elevate your legs above the level of your heart. Wedge-shaped pillows make this easier to do. You can also use pillows or folded blankets you have on hand to elevate your legs in bed to help circulation.Foot stool. If you’re sitting up, use a foot stool or hassock to elevate your legs and aid circulation.Under-desk cycle. If you sit a lot or if you spend time in front of a television, an under-desk cycle device could be a good investment. There are many brands and types of elliptical cycles that you can shop for online. Prices vary depending on your selection. Pedaling while you sit increases circulation in your legs, exercises your muscles, and burns calories.Supplements. Many herbs and vitamins are thought to increase overall blood flow. Be sure to talk with a healthcare provider before taking any supplements for improving blood circulation. Some supplements may have negative effects when taken with certain medications.Horse chestnut. Some evidence indicates that horse chestnut extract taken as a dietary supplement helps with blood circulation in the legs. A 2015 study found that horse chestnut was as effective as wearing compression stockings.Cayenne pepper. Cayenne pepper, especially in powder form, increases blood circulation, according to a 2018 review of studies.Lifestyle changes can help increase blood circulation in your legs and overall. Here are some guidelines:Stop smoking. If you smoke. Smoking has a negative effect on blood circulation. Nicotine restricts the flow of blood by causing blood vessels to tighten.Stay hydrated. When you’re well-hydrated, your heart has an easier job pumping blood through your blood vessels to your muscles. How much water you need to drink depends on your activity level, the climate, and the type of clothing you wear, according to the American Heart Association (AHA). If you wait until you’re thirsty to drink, you’re already dehydrated, per the AHA.Drink tea. Studies show that the antioxidants in tea may improve circulation, among other benefits. This is true for both black tea and green tea. Oolong tea has special properties because of the way it’s processed.Eat a balanced diet. Incorporate foods that are known to increase blood circulation, such as fatty fish, garlic, cinnamon, and onions.Try massage. A professional massage may help your circulation. It can also help you to relax and to reduce stress. You can also use self-massage for your legs.Take a warm bath. The effects of a hot or warm bath on blood circulation aren’t as good as exercise, but they can help.Try a sauna bath. Increased blood circulation is one of the science-based benefits of regular sauna use. Talk with a healthcare provider before you try sauna.If you have poor circulation in your legs, you can take specific steps to increase your blood flow. Increasing your movement is one of the most important steps you can take to improve circulation. Talk with a healthcare provider. They can help you create a treatment regimen that works best for you. Last medically reviewed on October 24, 2019Healthline has strict sourcing guidelines and relies on peer-reviewed studies, academic research institutions, and medical associations. We avoid using tertiary references. You can learn more about how we ensure our content is accurate and current by reading our editorial policy.Chiesa ST et al. (2016). Temperature and blood flow distribution in the human leg during passive heat stress. DOI:10.1152/japplphysiol.00965.2015 Chauhan M. (2018). 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