

... about men in hose

I am almost 67 years old, and I still remember the onset of strange and terrible sensations in my body the year President Kennedy was assassinated. I was 26, a lieutenant in the United States Air Force, and attending graduate school at MIT.

I wasn't diagnosed with MS until 1971, almost eight years after my first sensations. I was able to stay on active duty in the Air Force until I retired as a lieutenant colonel.

During those years, using the pistol-gripped cane given to me by a retired U.S. Navy captain, I made it a point to visit people who had MS and had to use a wheelchair. Most were retired military personnel. I always noticed tremendous swelling in their lower legs and feet. It was just an accepted fact of life.

After my visits, I would drive to a nearby Atlantic Ocean beach to stare out at the sea and sob. I thought my life was going to go downhill with a multitude of problems.

But after retiring, I did consulting work for a host of companies, some as far away as Sweden. I kept very

busy, even though by that time I had to use a wheelchair myself. At home, I did a lot of swimming and exercising. Still, I began to notice some swelling in my ankles and feet. It got worse. I loved to wear boots but now had a tough time getting them on and off.

Because of many MS health-related problems, I saw a legion of doctors—neurologists, urologists, psychiatrists, colon and rectal specialists, etc. I also saw nurses, physical therapists, and other health-care people. All these observers would comment: "Gee, look at all the edema you have in your lower legs!"

My kids used to say, "Gee Dad, your legs are awful swollen-looking and sort of purple."

By the early 1980s, my lower legs were always swelling. I sat with my feet raised whenever I could. I also got regular foot massages from a physical therapist. Over the years, not one doctor ever came up with a solution!

In 2003 I had a stroke. The swelling in my legs became a low priority. I spent a week in the hospital and saw a lot of therapists and nurses.

I wasn't able to do my usual swimming, and my feet swelled even worse. I ended up with a large ulcer on my foot. After the sore healed, my general practitioner said, "You should be wearing support hose."

WHAT?

My wife went to a medical supply store and bought my first-ever support

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hose. I've been wearing them ever since, and my feet look and feel great. I can actually wear my boots again! The support hose go from below the knee to the tips of my toes. A pair lasts six months and costs \$40. This comes out to less than a quarter a day.

Then I found out that many guys I know have been wearing support hose for years. There were different reasons involved, such as phlebitis, but vanity kept them quiet. I guess support

hose is something that they thought had to fly under the radar.

But to me, every man and woman who has limited mobility because of MS should just wear support hose and save him- or herself a lot of aggravation.

The question to ask is whether you have true swelling of the legs or if you have started to gain weight in your legs.

To differentiate, put gentle pressure with your thumb in your ankle area for a few seconds. If you see a persistent depression after removing your thumb, this is swelling. This is not normal, and you should consult your health-care professional right away.

In the meantime, in addition to eliminating as much salt as possible from your diet and keeping your legs elevated when you're sitting down, wear support hose! ■

Pedaling also helps combat the swelling of legs. Consider getting an exercise machine. And if you already have one, consider taking it out of the closet!

—The Editor



Lt. Col. Hank Brandli lives in Florida, where he maintains his Web site, www.hankbrandli.com. He wrote about learning to handle bowel problems in the **InsideMS** feature "Toilet World" in January 2003. See www.nationalmssociety.org/IMSJan03-ToiletProblems.asp.