

leg makeup

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Leg Makeup

Tinted, transfer-resistant makeup for the legs — covering veins, scars, bruises, uneven tone and pigmentation, or simply adding colour. It is a small category with an outsized history, and it is the one place in makeup where wartime rationing invented a product that never went away.

Where it came from

Stockings were rationed during the Second World War: nylon and silk went to parachutes, and bare legs were considered improper. The response was **liquid stockings** — leg paint applied to the skin, often with a seam drawn up the back of the calf with an eyebrow pencil. Cosmetics houses sold it commercially and improvisation filled the gaps with gravy browning and cold tea, which worked about as well as it sounds.

The modern product is a genuine transfer-resistant cosmetic and it survives because the underlying use case never went away.

What it is

Three constructions:

- **Spray or aerosol** — an even, fast, hands-free wash of colour over a large area. The dominant format.
- **Liquid or lotion** — rubbed in like a body lotion, with pigment and a film former.
- **Heavy cream / camouflage** — very high pigment, for scars, vitiligo, birthmarks and tattoos. Overlaps with [Tattoo Cover-Up Makeup](#).

The differentiator is **transfer resistance**. Legs meet chairs, trousers, car seats and each other, so the film former is doing most of the engineering: silicone resins, acrylate copolymers and waxes that set to a flexible, water-resistant layer.

Using it

- **Exfoliate a day ahead and moisturise**, so the colour does not grab on dry patches or around the knees and ankles.
- **Do not moisturise immediately before** — oil under a film former causes patchiness.
- **Blend at the edges**: the ankle, the top of the foot, the back of the knee. Those are where a hard line shows.
- **Let it dry fully** before dressing. This is where most of the transfer complaints originate.
- **Set with a translucent powder** for the highest transfer resistance.
- **Remove it the same day** with a proper cleanser; a film former left on overnight under bedding is a route to folliculitis.

Where it differs from self-tanner

They are frequently confused and they are unrelated in mechanism.

	Leg makeup	Self-Tanner
Colour source	Pigment sitting on the skin	Dihydroxyacetone reacting with skin proteins
Onset	Immediate	2–8 hours
Duration	Until washed off	5–7 days as the surface layer sheds
Correctable	Wash and start again	Wait, or use a Tan Remover
Coverage	Can hide veins, scars, marks	Cannot hide anything; it tints uniformly

If the aim is to *cover* something, makeup is the answer. If the aim is a colour that survives a shower, self-tan is.

Where it sits in the rules

Cosmetic in the US — FDA primary category (08), makeup preparations (not eye). Colour additives must be **approved for the intended use** and certified colours must come from **FDA-certified batches**.

Aerosol versions carry the warning statement required at **21 CFR 740.11** for self-pressurised cosmetic containers — do not puncture or incinerate, do not store above 120 °F, keep away from flame — with additional wording where a flammable propellant is used. Spray in a ventilated space, and avoid inhaling the cloud.

A leg product with an **SPF** would be a sunscreen drug in the US; most carry none, so bare legs under a tint are unprotected legs.

Shelf life

Twelve months after opening for a lotion or liquid. Aerosols keep longer but clog, and a spitting nozzle ruins the finish rather than posing a hazard. Camouflage creams in pots follow the usual jar caveat — decant rather than dipping, particularly when covering a scar or a healing area.

Related

- [Makeup](#) — the shelf this sits on, and the rest of it.
- [Cosmetics](#) — what the label is legally allowed to say, and the full catalogue.
- The rest of *Colour and contour* — [Blush](#) · [Bronzer](#) · [Contour](#) · [Highlighter](#) · [Face Paint](#) · [Body Paint](#).
- [Cellulite Cream](#) — the other body category, where optics are the honest part.
- Regulatory statements here follow the FDA and EU sources listed on [Cosmetics](#), read 16 August 2026.