

Lymphoedema of the leg

Information and Advice



Care. Compassion. Community.

The Prince of Wales Hospice

Lymphoedema Clinic
Halfpenny Lane
Pontefract
West Yorkshire
WF8 4BG

Contact Number: 01977 781459

Clinic Times

Monday, Thursday, Friday
09:00— 17:00

Dewsbury

Tuesday
10:00— 17:00



What is Lymphoedema?

Lymphoedema is a condition which causes swelling anywhere in the body but mostly in the arms and legs. Lymphoedema occurs when the lymphatic system, which drains away fluid from the body tissues becomes damaged or overloaded and is no longer able to cope. As a consequence there is a build up of water and proteins in the tissues beneath the skin surface which causes changes in the skin and surrounding tissues. The affected part feels tight and firm and the limb may feel heavy and ache, especially as the day goes on. The condition may be primary due to an abnormality of the lymphatic system or secondary where the lymphatic system is damaged for example due to injury, surgery or infection. Lymphoedema cannot be cured but it can be controlled and kept to a minimum through treatment.

Who is a risk?

Anyone who has had gynaecological, melanoma, prostate or kidney cancer in combination with inguinal node dissection and, often, radiation therapy. Lymphoedema can occur immediately post operatively, with a few months, a couple of years, or 20 years or more after cancer therapy. With proper education and care lymphoedema can be avoided or, if it develops, can be kept under control.

Visit your doctor at once

- If you see any signs of inflammation on the swollen limb
- If you see a spot resembling a small haemorrhage on your skin
- If pain or muscle weakness occurs; or
- If the swelling becomes worse in spite of adequate treatment

Do's and don'ts

In the home or at work

- Avoid injury, strain and exposure to extreme heat/cold.
- Never walk outside in bare feet.
- Take care cutting toe nails.
- Never bathe in very hot water.
- If you notice fungal infections of the feet (cracks between the toes, brittle nails etc) seek medical advice as soon as possible.
- If you notice discolouration or spots on the skin seek medical advice as soon as possible.
- Do not sit crossed legged.

Clothing

- Clothing should not be tight.
- Avoid tight belts and waistbands.
- Avoid pop socks, socks or stockings with tight elastic tops.
- Briefs with tight bands which cut into the waist or legs, should not be worn.
- Do not wear high heeled shoes.

Cosmetic or beauty treatment

- Take care when having a pedicure.
- Avoid cosmetics which irritate the skin.
- Take care when sunbathing – avoid sunburn.
- NO FIRM or kneading type massage.
- Shave legs with an electric razor.
- No saunas.
- No treatments to the leg to induce heat.
- Keep the leg clean and skin supple using something like E45 Cream or Eucerin.

In the garden

- Take care when digging.
- Be careful of spikes, thorns etc.
- Take care with pet scratches.
- Be careful not to get bitten by insects.



Sport

- Avoid violent exercise of the leg.
- Carryout exercises regularly whilst wearing your compression garment.
- Swimming is recommended but take care in the changing rooms and do not share a towel at the baths.
- Use a foot bath.

Diet

- Maintain a sensible weight for your height and build.
- Be moderate in your diet.
- There is no “lymphoedema” diet.
- Limit your salt intake

General

- No acupuncture in the affected side.
- No injections if possible on the affected side.
- No electrotherapy to induce heat to the body area.
- Maintain body hygiene.
- If possible keep the leg elevated whilst asleep.
- Avoid injury, strain and exposure to extreme heat/cold.
- Never walk outside in bare feet.
- Take care cutting toe nails.
- Never bathe in very hot water.
- If you notice fungal infections of the feet (cracks between the toes, brittle nails etc) seek medical advice as soon as possible.
- If you notice discolouration or spots on the skin seek medical advice as soon as possible.
- Do not sit crossed legged.

Can anything be done?

Lymphoedema cannot be cured. Its effect can be controlled and the quality of life improved with a treatment programme consisting of:

Skin care—to keep the skin in good condition.

External compression/support—in the form of elastic hosiery or sleeve.

Simple exercise—of the affected limb, carried out while wearing your sleeve or stocking.

Simple self massage—to stimulate the lymphatic system.

Depending on the severity of the lymphoedema, treatment by way of Manual Lymphatic Drainage MLD (special massage technique) and Multi-layer Bandaging may be required.



Useful numbers and contacts

Lymphoedema Support Network (LSN)

St Luke's Crypt
Sidney Street
London
SW3 6NH
Tel: 020 7351 0990

British Lymphology Society (BLS)

Administrative Centre
24 Kiniths Crescent
West Bromwich
B71 4BX
Tel: 01452 790178

BACUP (British Association of Cancer United Patients)

3 Bath Place
Rivington Street
London
EC2A 3JR
Tel: 020 769 69003

Breast Cancer Care

5-13 Great Suffolk Street
London
SE1 0NS
Tel: 0345 092 0800

We are committed to providing high quality care. If you have a suggestion, comment or complaint about the care or services you have received, or if you need this leaflet in another format, please contact the Director of Clinical Services on 01977 781468.



Care. Compassion. Community.

Ref: 9043
Version 2.0
Issued: Feb 2025
Review: Dec 2027

Registered Charity No: 514999