

CANCER RELATED LYMPHOEDEMA

A Patient's Guide

BLS BRITISH
LYMPHOLOGY
SOCIETY

This material has been reviewed
and approved by the BLS



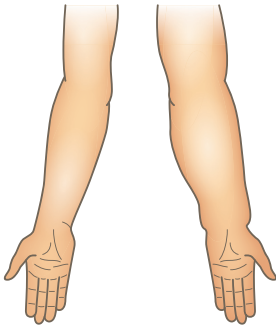
THERAPIES. HAND IN HAND.

BSN medical

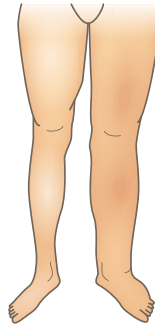
an Essity company

WHAT IS LYMPHOEDEMA?

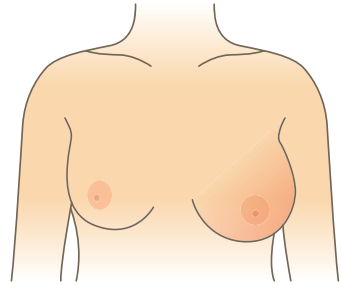
Lymphoedema results from a failure of the lymphatic system. Consequences are swelling, skin and tissue changes and a risk of infection. It most commonly affects the lower or upper limbs, but may also affect midline structures such as the face, neck, trunk, breasts or genitalia.¹



Upper extremity lymphoedema



Lower extremity lymphoedema

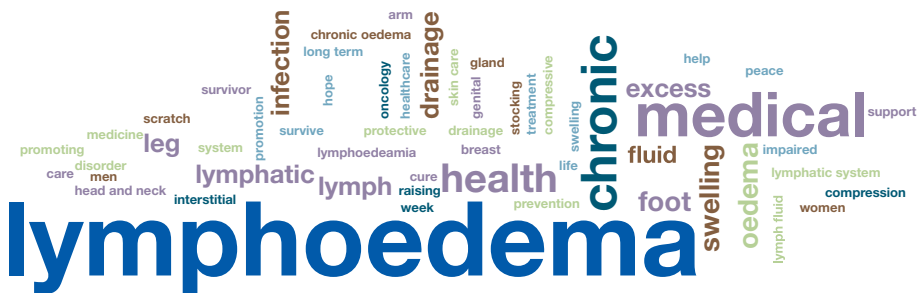


Breast lymphoedema

When the lymphatic system is not working properly, extra lymph fluid can overload it and lead to the development of lymphoedema.

This may happen when the lymphatic system is obstructed or damaged, for example; surgical removal of lymph nodes.

Lymphoedema is a chronic condition that never goes away because the lymphatic system can not repair itself. However with the right diagnosis and prompt treatment lymphoedema can be well managed.



WHAT IS THE LYMPHATIC SYSTEM?

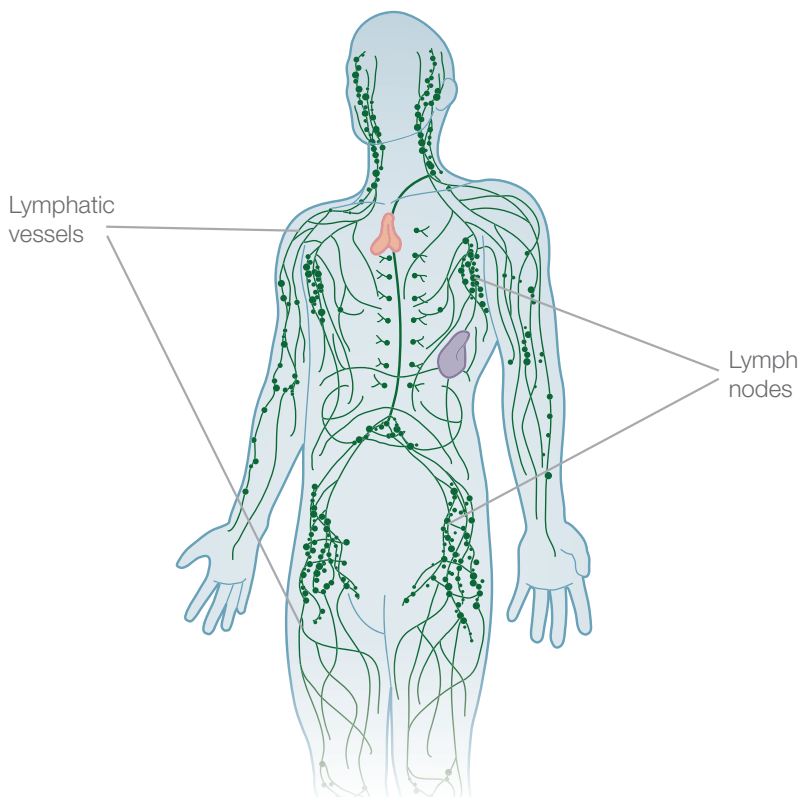
It is important to understand what the lymphatic system is and its function within the body.

The **lymphatic system** is a network of lymph vessels and lymph nodes that rid the body of toxins and waste to help protect it from infection and disease.

Lymph is the fluid that circulates throughout the lymphatic system and in the space between and around tissues and cells. It contains a variety of substances, including proteins, salts, glucose, fats, water and white blood cells.

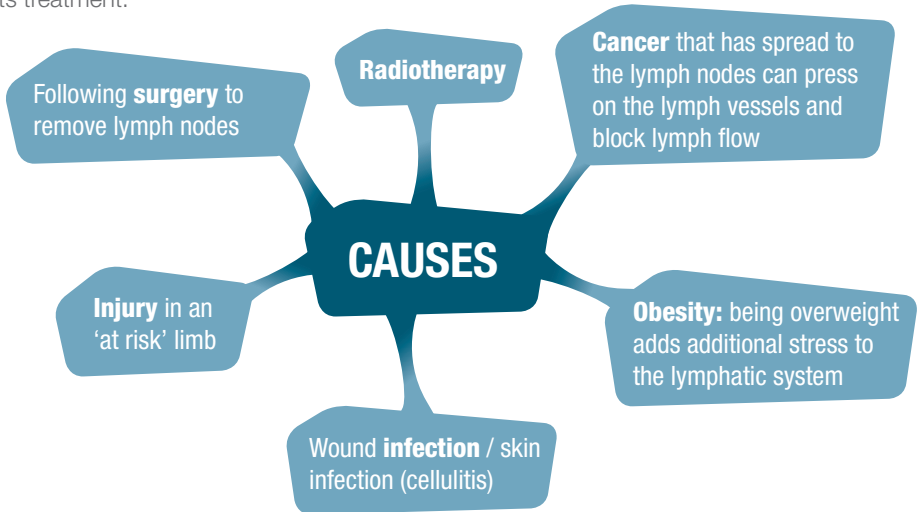
Lymph nodes work as filters, trapping viruses and bacteria before they can infect other parts of the body. They contain immune cells that can help fight infection.

Lymphoedema occurs when the lymphatic system cannot collect or transport the lymph fluid, this causes the lymph fluid to build up in the tissues, resulting in swelling and changes in skin appearance and texture.



WHAT CAN CAUSE LYMPHOEDEMA?

Lymphoedema can be caused by cancer itself or can develop as a side effect of its treatment:

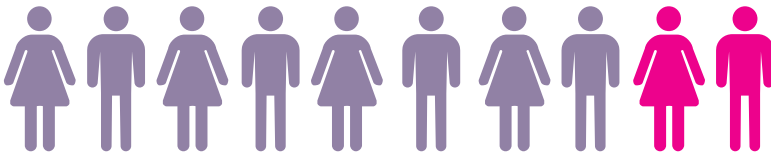


If you have noticed **weight gain** or **reduced mobility** seek advice from your GP to help maintain a healthy weight.

WHY ARE YOU AT RISK?

Not all patients who receive treatment for cancer, will develop lymphoedema.

However it is important for you to understand that you are at greater risk of developing lymphoedema due to your cancer treatment.



It is understood that in certain cancer types; for example breast cancer, around 20% of all patients who receive treatment will go on to develop lymphoedema².

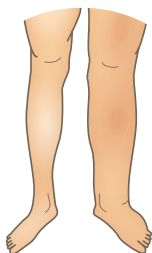
SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF LYMPHOEDEMA

If you experience any signs of lymphoedema, it is important to instigate prompt treatment to help limit the complications and worsening of your symptoms.

If lymphoedema develops in people who have been treated for cancer, it usually occurs in the arms and legs, but sometimes it affects the breast, underarm, back, trunk, face, neck and even genitalia.

If you experience a sudden onset of swelling, pain or skin discolouration, seek advice from your healthcare professional.

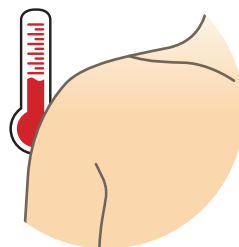
Look out for any of these signs and symptoms in all areas, not just the arms and legs:



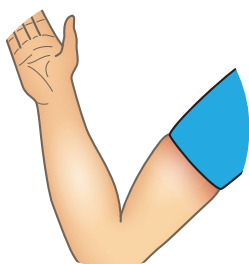
Swelling of a limb or other region of the body after surgery



Swelling of more than 3 months duration



Tightness or temperature changes to areas of the body



Clothing or jewellery feeling tighter. Feeling of tension and inflammation



Feelings of heaviness, tightness, firmness, pain, aching, soreness, numbness, tingling, stiffness in chest, torso or limb



Impaired mobility of legs, thighs, knees, toes, ankles, neck, shoulders, arms, elbows, wrist and fingers

RECOGNISING SIGNS OF INFECTION AND CELLULITIS

It is important to be aware of the early signs of infection in order to treat promptly.

Contact your GP straight away if you notice flu-like symptoms or any of the following signs of infection:



Redness or warmth in the limb that's at risk



Painful swelling in a limb that wasn't swollen before



Pain or tenderness in the limb that's at risk



Red streaks that go up or down from the affected area



High temperature or fever



Vomiting



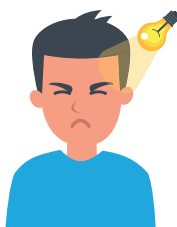
Headache



Tiredness or fatigue



Rash



Light sensitivity



Confusion



Seizures

HELPING TO REDUCE THE RISK OF DEVELOPING LYMPHOEDEMA

There are things you can do to help reduce your risk of developing lymphoedema that may also benefit you physically and psychologically.

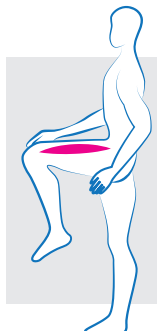
- Look after your skin to avoid damage, or an injury that may cause infection:
 - Clean and moisturise your skin daily
 - Protect your skin from the sun by using appropriate UV protection creams
 - Cuts and scratches should not be ignored but treated and covered as necessary
 - If you experience any signs of infection, contact your GP straight away
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Keep active to help stimulate the flow of lymph fluid in the body
 - Do not restrict yourself from doing the type or level of exercise that is normal for you
- When travelling for long periods, stop often or move around and stretch regularly

Treating yourself to other massages and facials can be beneficial to your wellbeing. This may not help to reduce your risk of developing lymphoedema.



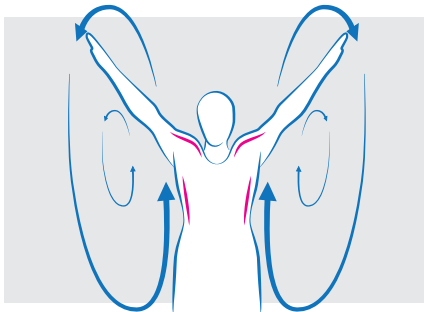
HELPFUL EXERCISES

Exercise does not have to be strenuous. Light activities can also help stimulate the flow of lymph fluid around the body. For further advice, ask your healthcare professional.



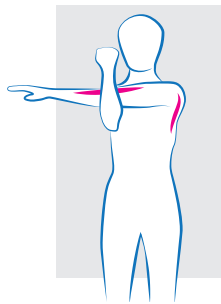
Knee-ups - 10-20 repetitions

Lift your knee up and touch your left hand to your right knee and vice versa.



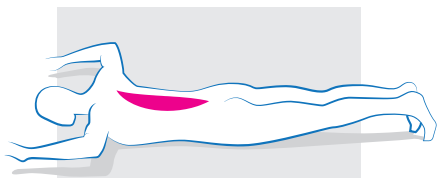
Double arm swing - 10-20 repetitions

Raise both arms above your head and rotate arms back and repeat. After a while change direction and rotate arms forward and repeat.



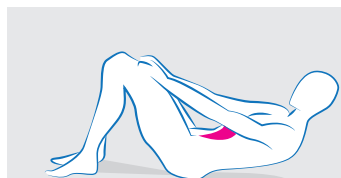
Arm cross-stretch

Take one arm across the body and hold a stretch for 10 seconds using your other arm. Switch arms and repeat.



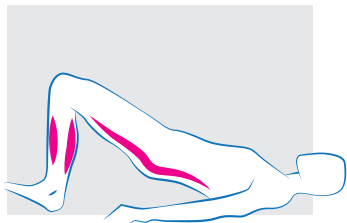
Shoulder lifts - 10-20 repetitions

Head is slightly raised in line with shoulders. Look to the ground. Lift your U-shaped arms and shoulders off the ground hold for 10 seconds, then lower and repeat.



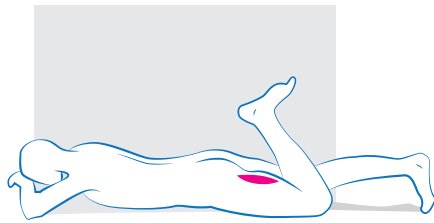
Sit-ups - 10-20 repetitions

Laying down with your knees bent lift you upper body off the ground, hold for a while then lower and repeat.



Supine position with legs bent - 10-20 repetitions

Lift your thighs up to form a line, hold for 10 seconds, then lower and repeat.

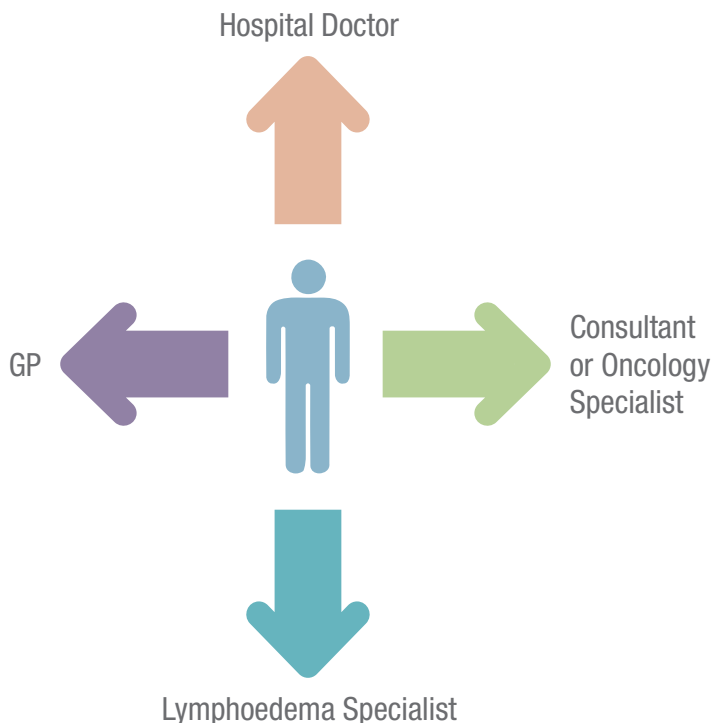


Lower leg lifts - 10-20 repetitions

Laying down with legs are stretched out. Lift one leg at a time to touch your buttock and lower, switch legs and repeat.

SEEKING HELP FOR DIAGNOSIS

If you have experienced one or more of the symptoms of lymphoedema you should contact any of the following to gain further advice and support:



Early diagnosis and treatment can improve lymphoedema treatment outcomes. The earlier treatment is started, the more successful it is likely to be.

If you are diagnosed with lymphoedema, you may be required to see a lymphoedema specialist.

If you do not know who to contact for advice, the Lymphoedema Support Network (LSN) may be able to provide you with support. See back page for contact details.

LSN
**THE LYMPHOEDEMA
SUPPORT NETWORK**
because lymphoedema matters

AFTER DIAGNOSIS

HOW IS LYMPHOEDEMA MANAGED?

There are normally two stages in the treatment and management of lymphoedema

- Intensive treatment or decongestion
- Long term maintenance and self-management

The level of your swelling will determine which stage you will start your treatment.

INTENSIVE TREATMENT

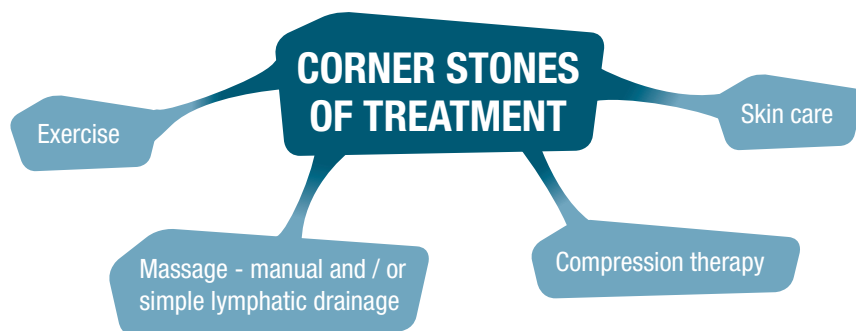
If you have a lot of lymph fluid built up in your limb or body area, you will start at this stage, with the aim to reduce limb volume over a period of approximately two-four weeks, using some of the following techniques.

- Compression bandaging
- Wrap compression systems
- Compression bras / vests
- Pneumatic pump compression
- Manual and / or simple lymphatic drainage massage
- Recommended exercises
- A good skin care regimen

LONG TERM MAINTENANCE AND SELF-MANAGEMENT

If your symptoms are less severe with only minimal swelling and / or a good shaped limb, you may commence your treatment at this stage, with the aim to maintain and optimise the limb shape using some of the following techniques.

- Compression garments
- Wrap compression systems
- Compression bras / vests
- Manual and / or simple lymphatic drainage massage
- Recommended exercises
- A good skin care regimen



SUPPORTING YOUR TREATMENT

Your healthcare professional will recommend appropriate treatment, suitable to your condition. They will always try to accommodate your individual needs by working with you, in partnership, to find the best treatment solution.

In order to achieve the best outcomes and prevent complications and worsening of your condition, it is important that you comply with your treatment.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

There is a lot of further information available about lymphoedema and how to effectively manage your condition.

The links below are some recommended sites that you may find useful.

The Lymphoedema Support Network - <https://www.lymphoedema.org>

Macmillan Cancer Support - <https://www.macmillan.org.uk>

Cancer Research UK - <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org>

British Lymphology Society - <https://thebls.com>

The NHS - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/lymphoedema>

Cancernet-UK - <http://www.cancernet.co.uk>

Breast Cancer Support - <https://breastcancersupport.org.uk>

BSN medical - <http://www.bsnmedical.co.uk>



References

1. The British Lymphology Society, what is Lymphoedema [online]. Available: [www.theBLS/education/what is lymphoedema](http://www.theBLS/education/what%20is%20lymphoedema) (accessed 2018, Jan 15)

2. Edwards, T.L. (2000) Prevalence and aetiology of lymphoedema after breast cancer treatment in southern Tasmania [online]. Available: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10843395 [accessed 02 Feb 2018]

BSN medical Limited

PO Box 258 • Willerby
Hull • HU10 6WT

www.bsnmedical.co.uk
Tel: 01482 670100 • Fax: 01482 670111
E-mail: compression.uk@bsnmedical.com



3665/718



an Essity company