

Lymphoedema of the arm

Advice on simple lymphatic drainage and exercises

Breast Care Nurse Led Lymphoedema Service Patient Information Leaflet



What is lymphoedema?

It is swelling caused by a build-up of lymph fluid in some of the body's tissues. This leaflet is for people who have lymphoedema of the arm.

What can I do to reduce lymphoedema?

You can help to reduce lymphoedema by:

- Doing simple exercises such as those in this leaflet (see page 3)
- A technique called simple lymphatic drainage (see pages 4 and 5)

Compression garments (hosiery)

If you have been fitted with compression garments to help control lymphoedema, here are some tips:

- Put the garment on first thing in the morning.
- Do not fold the top over on your garment.
- Make sure there are no wrinkles in the garment.
- Do not cut it (it will not work properly if you do and it is expensive).
- Do not tumble dry it or dry it on direct heat.
- Try wearing rubber gloves when putting on your garment as it will help you get it on.

Skin care

Good skin care is important to reduce the risk of infection. Here are some tips:

- Dry your skin well, especially between your fingers.
- Treat any cuts, scratches etc. with antiseptic cream immediately.
- Use an insect repellent to avoid being bitten during summer months or when you are on holiday.
- Take extra care when removing any unwanted hair on your arms – a cream or electric razor is safest.
- Do not have blood samples or blood pressure taken or injections on the affected arm.
- Avoid sunburn – wear a high factor sun lotion or do not expose the skin.
- Avoid hot baths, saunas and sunbeds.
- Apply cream or lotion each evening (it will soak into your skin overnight).

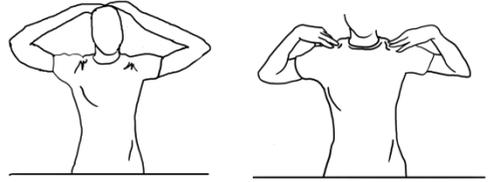
Other hints

- Do not carry heavy weights on your arm or put too much pressure on it, for example, heavy shopping bags.

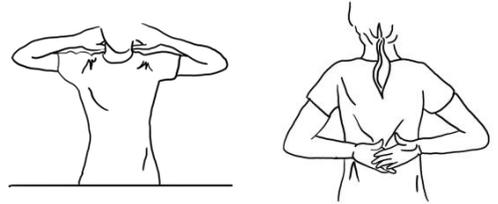
Exercises for lymphoedema of the arm

You should repeat all these exercises twice a day.

Put your hands on top of your head and then bring your hands down to your shoulders. Repeat 10 times.



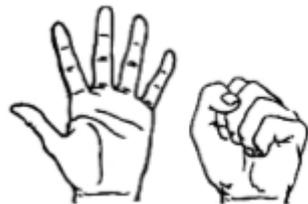
Put your hands behind your head and then bring them down behind your back in a wide circular movement. Repeat 10 times.



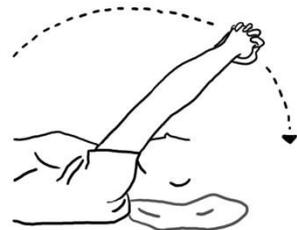
Slowly raise and lower arms from the elbow. Repeat 10 times.



Clench and unclench your hand and fingers. Repeat 10 times on both hands.



Lying on the floor, clasp your hands together on your tummy. Keeping your elbows straight, lift your arms over your head as far as you feel comfortable. Lower your arms slowly. Repeat 10 times.



Simple lymphatic drainage (SLD) for lymphoedema of the arm

SLD is a simple form of massage that is used to encourage fluid to drain from the swollen area of your arm to an area where it can drain normally. The following massage is designed to clear fluid from the chest and swollen arm. **It should be performed at least twice a day.**

You should massage the areas gently. Make sure the skin does not have any oil or cream on it so that good contact is kept between your hand and your skin.

1. Ensure that you are in a comfortable position – either lying down or sitting.
2. Massage the lymph glands in the side of your neck. Position both of your hands flat against your neck with your little finger just below your ears. Massage back and downwards, using a circular motion five times.



Then move your hands down a finger width and massage in the same way. Repeat this five times.

3. Massage your collarbone in an outwards direction. Repeat five times.
4. Now massage the unaffected armpit in the direction of back and up. Repeat five times. Move your hand down four finger widths and repeat this movement. Repeat numbers 2 to 4.



5. To massage the chest, place your affected arm on your chest nearest to your unaffected arm.

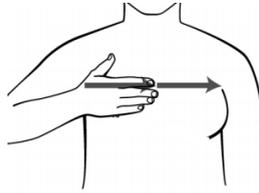


Figure 5a

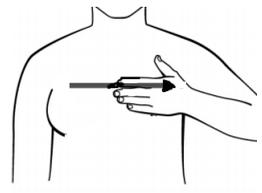


Figure 5b

Gently stroke your skin towards your unaffected armpit (see figure 5a).

If it is more comfortable, use the unaffected arm to massage. (see figure 5b). Do this for five to ten minutes, covering the whole of the chest area.

6. If someone is able to help you, ask them to massage your back starting at the unaffected arm, moving towards your swollen arm.



7. Finish the session with a short breathing exercise which helps to clear the deep lymphatic system. Place both hands on your abdomen (tummy area) and breathe in slowly and deeply. Hold your breath for two seconds and release. Repeat this five times.

