

Lymphoedema

Vascular Surgery

Patient Information Leaflet

Under Review

What is lymphoedema?

We all have a small amount of fluid (lymph) in our body tissues. This fluid leaves our blood system to provide water and nourishment to the tissues. Most of this fluid is collected by a system of drainage tubes, similar to blood vessels, called the lymphatic system.

Lymphoedema is swelling which is due to a build up of lymph in the limbs if the fluid is not draining out properly. To start with the swelling is often noticeable at the end of the day and goes down at night. However unless the swelling is treated properly the fluid becomes fixed in the leg permanently.

What causes lymphoedema?

The most common cause for lymphoedema is that you were born without enough lymphatics. If there are very few lymphatics then the swelling may start as a teenager or even earlier. This type of lymphoedema is called Milroy's Disease. One leg is often worse than the other and sometimes only one leg is affected.

In less severe cases the lymphatics may be able to cope initially and only start to fail when you are older. This kind is sometimes called Lymphoedema Tarda.

Are there any other causes?

Lymphoedema can also be caused if the lymphatics of the arm and leg are damaged by surgery or radiotherapy for the treatment of cancer. Sometimes this is unavoidable if the cancer is to be cured.

There are also some rare tropical parasites (Filariasis) that invade and block the lymphatics. These parasites do not live in Great Britain.

What effects does lymphoedema have?

Apart from the uncomfortable and unsightly swelling lymphoedema can cause problems especially if it is not kept under control. There is an increased risk of infection under the skin (cellulitis) and repeated attacks of cellulitis lead to more lymphatic damage. This vicious circle may eventually lead to severe infections, ulcers and even amputation in extreme cases.

What is the treatment?

Lymphoedema cannot be cured but it can usually be controlled so that complications do not occur later. The main ways of treating it are compression bandages or stockings, elevation of the limb and external pneumatic compression.

Elevation of the limb

Whenever the leg is elevated (raised up) fluid will tend to drain out of it. Put your legs up whenever you can and as high as you are able – the arm of a sofa is good. Elevate the end of your bed (six inches or so) in order that your feet are a little higher than your head. You can use some old books for this.

Compression bandages or stockings

Compression is required to squeeze the fluid out of your legs when you are standing up. Bandages may be required at first to remove the worst of the swelling before stockings can be used. These stockings need to be specially fitted and are much stronger than ordinary 'support tights'.

If the swelling only affects the lower leg then you can wear a below-knee stocking that is self-supporting, like a pop sock. The usual strength of stocking used is a Class II but sometimes a stronger Class III is required. If you have difficulty putting on your stockings, then you can buy a special stocking applicator.

External pneumatic compression (EPC)

Despite compression stockings many people find that some swelling accumulates by the end of the day. The EPC device is a pneumatic boot that inflates and deflates to squeeze fluid out of the leg. EPC is normally used in the evening to get rid of any fluid that has built up despite compression stockings. If your doctor thinks you need EPC therapy, a trial of the device will normally be arranged so that you can decide whether it is worth buying one.

What about surgery?

Many operations have been tried to cure lymphoedema but none have been successful. Surgery to reduce the size of the lower leg (Homan's Reduction) may be suggested if your leg remains very swollen despite compression therapy.

How can I help myself?

- Wear your compression stockings every day from morning to night.
- Elevate your legs whenever possible.
- Take plenty of exercise and don't put on weight.
- Keep the skin in good condition by using plenty of moisturising cream to prevent dryness.

Further help and information

The Circulation Foundation

Web: www.circulationfoundation.org.uk

www.patient.co.uk

Access to benefits

If you require information about benefits information can be found on:

www.direct.gov.uk

www.dwp.gov.uk

or your local benefits office.

Your comments

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) Freephone 0800 073 0510.

PALS is here to support patients, relatives or carers when they have concerns or queries. They will do their best to resolve any concerns you may have and can also give advice on making a formal complaint.

If you require any further information regarding our services or if you have any questions about the management of your condition, please contact your consultant or vascular nurse on the telephone numbers below.

Russells Hall Hospital, Dudley

Mr Jayatunga	Consultant vascular surgeon	Tel: 01384 244243
Mrs Shiralkar	Consultant vascular surgeon	Tel: 01384 244246
Mr Pathak	Consultant vascular surgeon	Tel: 01384 244245
Mr Rehman	Consultant vascular surgeon	Tel: 01384 244176
Mr Newman	Consultant vascular surgeon	Tel: 01384 244243
Mr Wall	Consultant vascular surgeon	Tel: 01384 456111 Ext 1235
Joy Lewis/Sharron Cole	Vascular nurse specialist	Tel: 01384 456111 Ext 2456 (answer machine)

New Cross Hospital, Wolverhampton

Mr Garnham	Consultant vascular surgeon	Tel: 01902 695977
Mr Hobbs	Consultant vascular surgeon	Tel: 01902 695971
Paula Poulton/Val Isgar	Vascular nurse specialist	Tel: 01902 695984

Manor Hospital, Walsall

Mr Abrew	Consultant vascular surgeon	Tel: 01922 721172 Ext 7763
Mr Khan	Consultant vascular surgeon	Tel: 01922 721172 Ext 6669
Fiona Fox	Vascular nurse specialist	Tel: 01902 721172 Ext 7648

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 0730510

ਜੇਕਰ ਇਹ ਲੀਫਲੈੱਟ (ਛੋਟਾ ਇਸਤਿਹਾਰ) ਤੁਸੀਂ ਆਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ (ਪੰਜਾਬੀ) ਵਿੱਚ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਕਰ ਕੇ ਪੇਸ਼ਟ ਇੰਨਫਰਮੇਸ਼ਨ ਕੋ-ਆੱਰਡੀਨੇਟਰ ਨਾਲ 0800 0730510 ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਨੰਬਰ ਤੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

यदि आपको यह दस्तावेज़ अपनी भाषा में चाहिए तो पेशन्ट इनफरमेशन को-आरडीनेटर को टैलीफ़ोन नम्बर 0800 0730510 पर फ़ोन करें।

જો તમને આ પત્રિકા તમારી પોતાની ભાષા (ગુજરાતી)માં જોઈતી હોય, તો કૃપા કરીને પેશન્ટ ઈન્ફોર્મેશન કો-ઓર્ડિનેટરને 0800 0730510 પર સંપર્ક કરો.

आपनि यदि এই প্রচারপত্রটি আপনার নিজের ভাষায় পেতে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে পেশেন্ট ইনফরমেশন কো-অর্ডিনেটরের সাথে 0800 0730510 এই নম্বরে যোগাযোগ করুন।

إذا كنت ترغب هذه الوريقة مترجمة بلغتك الاصلية (اللغة العربية) , فرجاءا اتصل بمنسق المعلومات للمريض
0800 0730510 على التلفون Information Co-ordinator

مہم ضرورت اریلفایٹ کو اپنی زبان (اردو) میں حاصل کرنے کے لئے رپورٹیں اپنی ٹیلیفون نمبر 0800 0730510 پر ویڈیو ایف ایکس کو اور ڈیٹیکٹر (مریضوں کے لئے معلومات کی فراہمی کے سلسلے میں) کے ساتھ رابطہ کریں۔

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