

LIVING WITH LYMPHOEDEMA REDUCING THE RISK

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As a side effect of your cancer treatment your lymphatic system is weakened. This puts you at risk of developing a swelling and/or infection in or around the area that has been treated. This swelling is called lymphoedema and could occur any time after treatment - even months or years later.

There are things that can increase this risk which you may want to avoid or be careful of:

- Needles/injections on the treated side
- Application of perfumed/coloured products to the skin on/around the treated side
- Hot saunas/steam rooms/very hot baths
- Any new exercise start gently and gradually build up
- Sunburn - use at least SPF 30 to avoid sunburn
- Wet shaving - use an electric shaver if possible

Looking after your skin and toe nails:

- Moisturising helps to keep your skin in good condition. Try to use a non-perfumed moisturiser daily. These are available on prescription - please ask your lymphoedema clinician or GP
- Avoid washing with soap as this dries the skin, swap for a non perfumed moisturising wash
- Treat any cuts/bites/scratches to the treated area with an antiseptic cream, apply a plaster if weeping and look out for signs of infection (redness/heat/pain). Seek medical attention if concerned
- Look after your toe nails, consider filing nails as an alternative to cutting them

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What to look out for

- Signs of swelling in the feet/ankles/legs/genital area
- Feeling of heaviness/aching/tightness to the leg on the treated side
- Recurrent infections (cellulitis) to/around the treated side. Cellulitis is an infection within the skin. It may present as a red/deep pink area which feels hot and tender to touch, it may present as a rash or feel like prickly heat. You may have flu like symptoms leading up to this and during (feel shivery, tired, headache, sweat at night). Seek medical help immediately as you may need antibiotics

Top Tips

- Gentle exercise keeps fluid moving. Try to do some form of exercise every day. Even moving your legs and deep breathing when sitting in a chair helps. Walking and swimming are also great forms of exercise.
- If sitting for long periods try and elevate your lower legs/knees on a stool.
- Wearing briefs or lycra jockeys can help reduce the risk of scrotal swelling. Avoid loose boxer shorts as they give the genital area no support.
- Wearing flight socks and moving about when on a flight can help reduce the legs from swelling.
- Don't reduce the amount of fluid you drink. General advice is to drink 1.5 - 2 litres of fluid every day to keep the body healthy.

Please contact us if you have any concerns

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