

LIVING WITH LYMPHOEDEMA SKIN CARE



Your lymphatic system helps the body to fight infection, but having lymphoedema puts you at an increased risk of infection to and around the area which is swollen. This is known as cellulitis. Skin problems such as very dry hard skin, broken skin, sores and infections are common. To give your skin the best possible chance of resisting damage, follow our guidelines on how to look after your skin.

Your skin care routine

- Clean your skin daily using mild, non-drying products. Avoid using ordinary soaps as they tend to dry the skin.
- Dry your skin thoroughly after washing, especially between digits. If your skin is fragile, gently pat dry with soft towels.
- Moisturise with a non-perfumed product at the end of the day when you've removed your garment.
- Lip balms help to prevent dry/cracked lips.
- Take good care of your nails and cuticles. Seek advice from your pharmacist on athlete's foot or poor nail conditions.
- Use an electric shaver or safety razor to minimise the risk of cuts.
- Take care when handling pets as scratches or bites may lead to infection (cellulitis).
- If you're worried about any skin changes, such as warts or dermatitis, get advice from your GP.
- Treat all skin cuts immediately with antiseptic cream and a dressing.
- Wear protective footwear and gloves when gardening.
- Use a thimble when sewing if you have arm lymphoedema.

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Things to avoid:

- Injections, blood sampling or blood pressure on your affected limb
- Saunas, steam rooms, sun beds, very hot baths and sunbathing
- Deep tissue or aromatherapy massage to the affected limb and adjacent body quadrant
- Any tight clothing or jewellery near your affected area
- Fake tanning products or spray tans as the chemicals may increase the risk of sensitivity and further swelling
- Avoid using a wet shaver, hair removal cream or having the affected limb waxed

Tips for the Summer

- Don't be alarmed if your swelling increases. This is normal in hot weather, so try to wear your compression garment as much as possible.
- A SPF30 sun screen with a UVA rating of 4 or 5 stars is generally considered as a good standard of sun protection - and try to avoid sunbathing.
- Use insect repellent to keep those hungry critters at bay. If you are bitten, immediately apply antiseptic cream to the affected area and cover if necessary. Keep an eye on signs of infection (spreading redness, pain, increased swelling) and seek GP advice if concerned.
- Keep a spare garment in a sandwich bag in the fridge. It'll be lovely and cool when you put it on!
- Cool showers can help to lower your body temperature.
- We may advise you carry an emergency course of antibiotics when travelling abroad if you've had a history of cellulitis or react badly to mosquito bites
- If flying, wear your garment and exercise your limb frequently during the flight.
- Always shower after swimming to remove any chemicals from the skin. Remember to re-apply sun screen after.
- If you have leg lymphoedema, wear swim shoes to protect your feet around the pool or on the beach.
- Use the coolest part of the day (early morning or late evening) to exercise. Swimming, or exercises in water, are excellent activities as the water will help you stay cooler.

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