

Lymphoedema Service

**Education: Supporting self
management**



What to expect today

- information about our service
- what Lymphoedema is
- education and tips for self management
- opportunity to ask questions
- website and links
- how to book your appointment.

Who we are; the lymphoedema service

A nurse led specialist service offering:

- a thorough first assessment, follow up appointments and referrals
- a diagnosis and treatment plan
- delivery of treatments
- education
- discharge when appropriate.



Image obtained from www.unsplash.com

Our main bases are located at Rainham, Paddock Wood, Herne Bay and Ashford.

Your first assessment

A registered nurse will carry out your assessment at one of our main clinics.

- general health questions and medical history
- examination of the affected area
- your blood circulation will be checked, using a handheld doppler;
- a formal diagnosis
- planning care and treatments
- measurements may be taken
- education, advice and leaflets provided
- planning of future appointments.

What is Lymphoedema?

Lymphoedema is when the vessels that usually carry what's known as **lymph** fluid, around our body are unable to do their job properly. This fluid gets left behind under the skin which causes it to fill up or swell.

This usually happens because the **lymphatics** (the vessels or structures that carry the lymph) have been damaged in some way. But some people can be born with it.

Understanding the **lymphatic system** helps us to understand why lymphoedema happens...

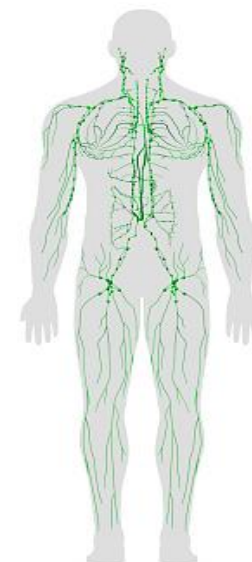


Image obtained from www.unsplash.com

The Lymphatic System

- a network of tubes and vessels, which runs alongside, but separate to the blood stream. They rely on **muscle movement** to push the fluid around – they are not pumped by the heart
- the lymphatic system is similar to a waste disposal system; draining away leftover fluid from the tissues surrounding the skin, fat, muscle and bone, containing things like bacteria, proteins and viruses
- then it is taken to the nearest lymph nodes such as in the groin or armpit, where it is filtered and cleaned by your white blood cells
- after passing through the Lymph nodes, it finds its way back into the veins, then back to the heart and is eventually removed as urine.

Skincare

- wash and dry skin carefully, not forgetting skin folds and in between toes;
- regular skin checks
- treat fungal infections
- moisturise your limb(s) daily
- helps prevent dry or cracked skin, which can lead to leaking fluid, ulcers and infection
- helps prevent other skin conditions caused by lymphoedema
- apply the last stroke in direction of hair growth
- some moisturisers are flammable (liquid paraffin) please keep away from naked flame / cigarettes.

Exercise

- lymphatic vessels rely on muscle movement to help pump the fluid away, they are not pumped by the heart
- exercise helps to control swelling, promotes flexible joints, improves balance, posture, and gait
- exercise helps to control weight and gain a sense of positive wellbeing
- deep breathing exercises also help to move fluid around
- exercise safely and at a level that suits you
- consider passive/simple exercises for those with reduced mobility or unable to mobilise.

Simple and passive exercises for lower limb swelling

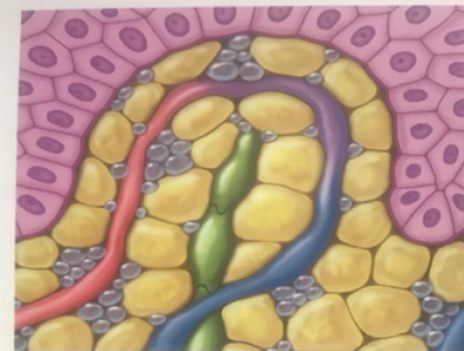
<p>Roll your foot in a circle Repeat in the opposite direction</p>	<p>Place your foot flat on the floor Tap your heels</p>	<p>Sit with your feet down Straighten and bend your knee</p>
<p>Stand holding on to a firm surface (e.g. table) Lift one foot off the floor as high as you can Slowly lower back down</p>	<p>Bend your knee, lifting your foot up behind you and lower</p>	<p>Slowly bend both your knees and then slowly stand back up</p>

Depending on your ability, consider repeating these several times a day.

Image obtained with permission from www.lymphoedema.org from an original article by Mel Thomas.

Managing your weight

- obesity and being overweight can worsen and / or be the direct cause of lymphoedema, and make treatment less effective
- an increase in the fatty layer in our skin can squash the lymphatic vessels and nodes, reducing their ability to drain fluid away
- unhealthy diet and lifestyles can affect our immunity, which can have an impact on our lymphatic system
- studies have shown that one of the most effective ways to reduce swelling is to maintain a normal healthy weight
- for those who are obese, weight reduction can significantly improve lymphoedema.



Adiposis restricting lymphatic vessels

Improving dietary intake

- think more about your health, not just your weight
- reduce processed foods
- check portion sizes www.bhf.org.uk search: Food portions
- increase fruit and vegetables
- increase pulses and bean
- reduce saturated fats
- reduce added sugars and aim for more naturally occurring sugars
- food labelling can be very confusing always read the ingredients lists
- consider the above in relation to snacks and drinks: are they processed?
high in sugar / salt / fats? portion sizes?

Overwhelming? Start with two or three small changes.

Other self management techniques

- leg elevation
- sleeping in a bed
- healthy lifestyle choices
 - consider reducing alcohol / smoking
 - drink plenty of fluids
 - take care of your mental wellbeing
- preventing infection
 - avoid injections to the affected area
 - skin care and skin inspection
 - avoid sunburn
 - what to do in extreme heat?
 - ensure bedding, clothing and garments are washed regularly.

Cellulitis

- cellulitis is an infection within the skin which starts suddenly and is not contagious;
- people with lymphoedema are at higher risk
- symptoms: increase in pain, swelling, and redness, the area can be hot to touch and blisters or rash may appear.
- you may feel generally unwell, for example, temperature, vomiting and flu like symptoms
- rare or severe cases can lead to **sepsis**.

If you develop cellulitis:

- **contact your GP** immediately – you may need antibiotics
- remove any compression garment, place the limb in a comfortable position, drink plenty of water and reintroduce your usual care regimen as soon as it is comfortable to do so
- contact your GP again if no improvement is seen or symptoms become worse.

Lymphoedema treatments

Compression garments:

- limits the amount of fluid building up
- supports the muscles in pumping the fluid
- helps soften firm tissues due to the massaging effect of the garment against the skin during movement / exercise
- improves discomfort, reduces risk of infection.

Decongestive treatments:

- used in combination with compression garments
- helps to break down firm tissues, improve drainage and reduce swelling
- usually an intensive treatment course at one of our clinics.

Garment examples



Images obtained with permission from Juzo UK

Summary

- skincare
- exercise
- put your feet up (if possible) when resting
- prevention of infection and being aware of cellulitis
- weight management
- healthy lifestyle choices.

Any Questions?

- **The Lymphoedema Support Network** – www.lymphoedema.org
- **What is Lymphoedema?** – www.kentchft.nhs.uk/leaflet/lymphoedema
- **ONE YOU Kent; 0300 123 1220.** www.kentcht.nhs.uk/service/one-you-kent
 - Lifestyle advice and support
- **Help Kent and Medway** - www.helpkentandmedway.co.uk
 - Counselling and talking therapies.



Exclusion criteria

- if you think you may have any of the following, which have **not been examined or treated, please contact your GP** and request further investigations:
 - open wounds to the area where swelling is occurring
 - unstable heart conditions (for example, Heart failure)
 - suspected blocked arteries or main veins
 - untreated blood clot (Deep vein thrombosis)
 - suspected tumours / cancer which has not been investigated or diagnosed.
- as our main treatment is compression therapy **you will need to be able to apply and remove garments** – if this is something you cannot do independently you may need to organise help from friends, family or a carer.

Next steps...

In the next eight weeks, you will receive a letter when we are able to offer an assessment with a specialist lymphoedema practitioner.

If you do not meet the exclusion criteria, please follow the instructions on the letter to book your first appointment.



Compassionate



Aspirational



Responsive



Excellent

 In everything we do, **we care** 