



AKADEMISKA  
SJUKHUSET

# Lymphedema

Information



This information has been designed for those who suffer from or have questions about lymphedema.

We understand that you and your family will have a lot of questions about care and treatment. We hope that you will find the answers to some of your questions in this information sheet.



## If you have questions, please contact:

Contact us via e-services at [www.1177.se](http://www.1177.se)

ödemmottagningen's (the Edema clinic) voicemail: 018-611 56 34

email: [funktionsbrevlåda@akademiska.se](mailto:funktionsbrevlåda@akademiska.se)



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# Information about lymphedema

Lymphedema is caused by a deficiency of the lymphatic transport capacity in the lymphatic system, which may be caused by disease, malformation, treatment (e.g. surgery, radiotherapy) or trauma. The decreased capacity leads to the accumulation of lymphatic fluid under the skin, which results in changes to the tissue.

## Chronic condition

Lymphedema is usually a chronic condition with increased collection of lymphatic fluid in the body, often in the arm or leg. Swelling can also appear in adjacent parts of the body, in the head and neck, breasts or genitals.

## Disability

Lymphedema can cause significant impairments, such as reduced mobility and work capacity, heaviness and tension, increased risk of infection and psychological and cosmetic problems.

## Treatment

There is currently no known cure for lymphedema, but with the adequate treatment, symptoms can be managed. If left untreated, lymphedema can gradually worsen and become difficult to treat.

Lymphedema can be treated in a variety of ways. Conservative treatment involves compression treatments. In addition, general recommendations are provided regarding self-care, manual lymphatic drainage, weight loss and range of motion exercises.

# Compression

## Why compression?

Regular use of compression garments on swollen limbs or other body parts is the most important component of lymphedema treatment. Compression garments help transport lymphatic fluid away from the tissue as waste products and water. Compression prevents the swelling from worsening and can often help to reduce the size of the edema.

You may need to use compression garments both during the day and at night if the swelling is extensive and interferes with daily activities. These garments are fitted by a lymphedema therapist.

## Management and donning of compression garments

Compression garments are put on early in the morning before swelling has time to increase.

If you find it difficult to put on compression garments, there are aids that the lymphedema therapist can provide.

Use rubber gloves to protect your hands and nails as well as the compression garment itself.

The garment should lay flat against the body to provide a gentle and even pressure.

The garment should be rinsed daily and should be machine washed once a week at 40°C. This rinses our skin flakes and bacteria and allows the garment to regain its elasticity and maintain its compression class.

If you apply lubrication to the skin before putting on the garment, let the lubrication dry thoroughly first.

## **Co-payment for compression garments**

Compression garments are classified as medical aids, and a co-payment applies to these items according to the region's guidelines.

## **Self-care**

### **Get to know your body and how lymphedema affects your body**

Taking good care of yourself and your body is an important part of treatment for lymphedema. The way lymphedema manifests itself is different between individuals and can be experienced in different ways. If you are diagnosed with lymphedema, it is important to take a preventive approach to reduce the risk for severe swelling. Most of the time, there are things you can do yourself to improve your lymphedema symptoms.

### **Physical activity**

It is recommended that you get at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day. If lymphedema symptoms make it difficult to get 30 minutes of continuous exercise, exercise sessions can be divided into shorter sessions of at least 10 minutes.

The right amount of physical activity stimulates the transport of lymphatic fluid.

Sometimes you may notice that swelling actually increases during and after activity.

This is normal and not dangerous as long as the swelling decreases again.

If you are unsure about what exercise is right for you, you can discuss this with your lymphedema therapist or another healthcare provider.

### **Deep breathing and breaks**

Deep breathing exercises can help the flow of the lymphatic fluid through the body. It can be a good idea to take regular breaks during the day and take a few rounds of deep breathing.

### **Things that may aggravate symptoms**

- Intense heat and exposure to sun
- Infection
- Stress
- Weight gain
- Repetitive, heavy work and heavy lifting
- Tight, constrictive clothing
- Jewellery, watches and rings
- Air travel

### **Things that may improve symptoms**

- Regular use of compression garments
- Self-treatment in the form of self-lymphatic drainage.
- Physical activity
- Weight management

## Skin

The skin is the largest organ of the body, and one of its functions is to protect us against bacteria and viruses. Damaged and dry skin, such as athlete's foot, cracked or peeling cuticles, cracks in the skin, eczema and small wounds, offer a gateway for bacteria and viruses.

When you have lymphedema, the affected body part is more vulnerable to bacteria, which can lead to infections, so-called cellulitis, or erysipelas. This is because the immune system is weakened, and fluid retained in the tissue creates a good breeding ground for bacteria.

When you use compression garments, the skin can dry out more easily. A good daily skin care routine is therefore recommended.

The main symptoms for erysipelas are high fever, redness and pain. If you have those symptoms, it is important to contact your care provider immediately to get treatment with antibiotics.

### **You can take steps to reduce the risk of bacterial infection through the skin:**

- Keep your skin clean and try to use soap with a low pH, which you can purchase yourself at a pharmacy. Dry your skin thoroughly after showering and bathing, especially in skin folds.
- Air out your skin if you get sweaty.
- Moisturise your skin daily, especially if you use compression garments.
- Take good care of your cuticles, cracked skin and eczema.
- Pay close attention to wounds and keep them clean with soap and water. Protect them with a bandage.
- Protect your skin during household work and gardening by wearing gloves and shirts with long sleeves.
- If possible, avoid blood samples and acupuncture in swollen body parts.
- Take extra care when shaving with a razor. Hair removal cream may be a better choice.

## Referral process

The Edema clinic at Uppsala University Hospital assesses and treats lymphedema patients throughout the Uppsala region. A doctor's referral is required for an appointment at the clinic.

Diagnosis of lymphedema takes place via a referral written by a general practitioner for lymphoscintigraphy when the underlying cause of lymphedema is unclear.



### **1177**

You will find information and services for your health on the website [1177.se](http://1177.se). For health care advice call 1177, open 24 hours a day.



### **Contact Akademiska**

Akademiska sjukhuset can be contacted via:  
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Patientkontakt: 018-611 30 33,  
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[www.akademiska.se](http://www.akademiska.se)