

## Compression garments

### Other formats

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### What are compression garments

Compression garments control swelling. They are made of firm elasticated material and can be sleeves, gloves, stockings, tights, toe gloves, or other specialist items.

### Benefits of wearing compression garments

Compression garments play an important part in lymphoedema and lipoedema management. They can be used to control early signs of mild swelling or after a course of intensive treatment for long term management.

Compression garments apply pressure to the skin to reduce swelling, with the strongest support at the hand or foot for arm or leg garments. The aim is to push fluid away from the limb to the centre of the body. The garment, combined with muscle movement through activity/exercise causes a 'massage' effect that directs fluid out through existing lymphatic vessels.

### Guidelines and tips for wearing compression garments

- Apply garments first thing in the morning, after washing or showering. Swelling will be at its minimum and garments will be easier to put on.
- All areas that are swollen should be covered by the garment.
- A pair of household rubber gloves can provide additional grip to put garments on and to spread the fabric evenly, for even pressure.
- The garment should be worn all day. If removed the swelling will not be controlled.
- Remove garments (unless told otherwise by the lymphoedema therapist) at night before bed and moisturise skin. Moisturising before applying garments will make it more difficult to apply and over time may affect the elastin's in the garment, reducing its functionality.
- Garment application aids are available; some are on prescription if you are experiencing difficulty with applying. Please ask your lymphoedema therapist for details.

- Never fold the top of the garment over or turn back a foot piece. This increases the pressure at these points and can have a constricting effect, making the swelling worse.
- Ensure that the garment fabric is free of wrinkles, creases and folds to aid comfort, prevent skin damage and constriction.
- Garments should be worn when exercising (but not when swimming).
- Garments should be changed every day to maintain their optimum function. Two garments, one to wear and one to wash will be provided either through the lymphoedema therapist, your GP or a combination.
- Garments need to be replaced every 6 to 12 months to ensure they work effectively.
- Washing and drying instructions are provided by the manufacturer.

### **Remove compression garments and contact your therapist or seek medical attention if:**

- Your fingers/toes start to turn white, blue, mottled or purple.
- You experience any numbness or tingling (pins and needles) or have a loss of sensation in a limb.
- You feel short of breath.
- The garment becomes too tight, causing pain or irritation/trauma to the skin.
- You experience redness, discomfort/pain, heat, a rash or flu-like symptoms which means you could have an infection (cellulitis).

### **Further information and references**

North Devon Lymphoedema Service – Tel: 01271 341551

Breast Cancer Care – [www.breastcancercare.org.uk](http://www.breastcancercare.org.uk)

British Lymphology Society – [www.lymphoedema.org/bls](http://www.lymphoedema.org/bls)

Lymphoedema Support Network – [www.lymphoedema.org/lsn](http://www.lymphoedema.org/lsn)

Macmillan Cancer Relief – [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

NHS Choices – [www.nhs.uk/conditions/lymphoedema](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/lymphoedema)

Lymphoedema: Advice on self-management and treatment 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Mortimer, P and Todd, J  
Beaconsfield, 2011

Lymphoedema Framework. *Best Practice for the Management of Lymphoedema*.  
International consensus. London:MEP Ltd, 2006.

Lymphoedema Support Network – [www.lymphoedema.org/lsn](http://www.lymphoedema.org/lsn)

## **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern, call 01271 314090 or email [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

## **Have your say**

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk).

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