

Skin care

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Why is skin care important?

Skin care is an important aspect in those who are at risk of developing lymphoedema and those people with lymphoedema, lipoedema and complex chronic oedema as skin problems are common. Good care helps to keep the skin from becoming dry and cracked keeping it soft and supple and helps to prevent it breaking down causing wounds, lymphorrhoea (lymph fluid) leakage and infection.

How can I look after my skin?

Daily care of the skin to the swollen/enlarged limb.

- Check skin regularly and carefully – look for redness, cuts, bites and scratches. If present, apply over the counter antiseptic and monitor until healed. If the area becomes redder, bigger, swollen, uncomfortable, hot, starts oozing and you generally feel unwell ('flu-like symptoms') seek medical attention.
- Wash and dry carefully, paying particular attention to any skin folds as well as in between fingers and toes.
- Moisturise the limbs daily. Swollen limbs should be moisturised at night after removing compression garments. Apply moisturiser in a downward action as the hair grows. Avoid scented moisturisers and if changing products patch test on another part of the body.

General do's and don'ts

Arms and Legs

- Exercise to encourage lymph flow.
- Treat cuts, bites or grazes by washing and applying over the counter antiseptic.
- Dry well between fingers and toes. Monitor and treat any fungal infection promptly.
- Use an electric razor to avoid skin trauma.
- Use insect repellent sprays to prevent bites.

- Use high factor sun creams.
- Treat pets to avoid fleas.

Arms

- Wear washing up gloves, oven gloves and gardening gloves, if you have upper limb lymphoedema or are at risk.
- Wear a thimble for sewing.

Legs

- Wear footwear if feet or legs are swollen. Avoid going barefoot.

Try to avoid if possible in a swollen limb, having:

- Blood taken
- Injections
- Blood sugar finger prick tests
- Cannulas inserted
- Acupuncture
- Blood pressure taken

Further information

North Devon Lymphoedema Service Tel: 01271 341551

Breast Cancer Care – www.breastcancercare.org.uk

British Lymphology Society - www.lymphoedema.org/bls

Lymphoedema Support Network – www.lymphoedema.org/lisn

Macmillan Cancer Relief – www.macmillan.org.uk

NHS Choices – www.nhs.uk/conditions/lymphoedema

References

British Lymphology Society – www.lymphoedema.org/bls

Lymphoedema: Advice on self-management and treatment 3rd 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/lisn

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. 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.

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