



Welcome to

Teesside
HOSPICE

Lymphoedema: Legs

Advice and guidance to manage
lymphoedema symptoms in the legs

Application of Moisturising Cream to the Leg

Skin care is a vital part of lymphoedema management, and it is important for you to make the application of a moisturiser part of your everyday routine. Applying a moisturising cream at least once a day can help with lymphatic drainage, promote healthy and elastic skin and prevent cellulitis

A video showing skincare for the leg can be found on our website:
www.teessidehospice.org/lymphoedema-clinic

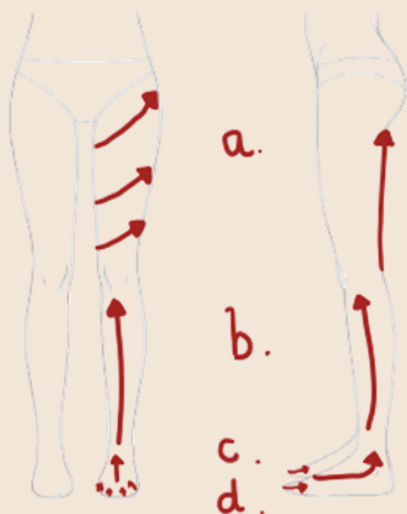
Preventative Skin Care

- Gently wash skin, avoid harsh soaps
- Wash and dry thoroughly especially between toes
- Moisturise daily with a gentle cream i.e. Epaderm, Diprobase or Doublebase.
- Take care cutting toenails
- Avoid getting the affected leg sun burnt
- Avoid insect bites, use a repellent
- Avoid injections in the affected leg
- Check skin regularly for breaks, inflamed areas and fungal infection between the toes or toenails

How to apply Moisturising Cream:

1. Gently stroke from the top of the inner thigh, across the front of the thigh towards the hip. Move a hand width down and repeat the sequence until reaching the knee.
2. Gently stroke the back of the leg from the knee up to the bottom (This will ensure the back of the leg is moisturised.)
3. Gently stroke from the ankle up towards the knee ensuring all the lower leg is moisturised.
4. Gently stroke the front and sides of the foot up towards the ankle and in-between each toe.

Refer to diagram below which demonstrates the direction to apply the moisturising cream.



Cellulitis

The fluid in the tissues of your swollen leg is an ideal place for germs to multiply. Even small cracks or cuts in the skin can allow germs to enter, which can take hold and result in infection (cellulitis). If your leg becomes hot, red or painful, this may mean infection is present and you may need an antibiotic.

Repeated attacks of infection will cause further damage to the lymphatic vessels and result in worse swelling. It is important to try to cut down the risk of infection by taking very good care of your skin. Moisturising your skin every day will help keep it supple and prevent it from becoming dry and cracked.

- If you have an infection your leg may be red, hot or inflamed or you may feel unwell – contact your GP promptly for antibiotics
- Carry emergency supply of antibiotics if you are susceptible to infection

Be Aware

Skin products containing paraffin-based products in contact with clothing are easily ignited with a naked flame or cigarette.



Cellulitis in Lymphoedema

What is Cellulitis in Lymphoedema?

Cellulitis is a sudden, non-contagious infection of the skin caused by a bacterial infection (usually Streptococcus). People with lymphoedema are particularly susceptible to cellulitis because the lymphatic system is damaged or overloaded and does not function adequately to fight infection.

What Causes Cellulitis?

Infection may enter by a break in the skin, such as a scratch or insect bite or through a pre-existing wound or ulcer, or through an area of skin inflammation, for example athlete's foot, eczema or dermatitis.

However, it may not always be possible to identify the cause and an attack may arise without warning at all.

Symptoms of Cellulitis

The patient often (but not always) feels unwell first, as if flu is starting. Symptoms may include fever, shivers, muscular aches and pains, headache, nausea, and vomiting.

The swollen area then develops a rash or becomes red, hot, and tender to the touch. Swelling may dramatically increase and pain may occur in the swollen area, or the armpit, with lymphoedema of the arm, or groin with lymphoedema of the leg.

What should I do if I get Cellulitis?

Contact your doctor immediately as you will need antibiotic treatment.

This is very important, not only because the sufferer may become very ill, but because lymph drainage routes risk being damaged further, causing

the swelling to worsen and lead to permanent skin changes, for example tissue thickening and this does not help the long-term management of lymphoedema.

Treatment for Cellulitis

You will need a 2-weeks course of antibiotics (flucloxacillin or Clarithromycin 500mg twice a day if allergic to penicillin or Doxycycline 100mg twice a day if allergic to penicillin and on statins

You may need longer than a 2-week course if the cellulitis does not resolve so contact your GP if symptoms persist once the 2 week course has been completed.

Evidence taken from the Lymphoedema Support Network 'Consensus Document on the Management of Cellulitis in Lymphoedema'

Lymphoedema Treatment

Continue with skin care if not too painful but remove any compression, start wearing it again when it is comfortable to do so following the start of the antibiotics.

Stop any other lymphoedema treatments and elevate limb, rest and drink plenty of water, taking painkillers/paracetamol as needed.

Long Term Antibiotics

If you have 2 or more episodes of cellulitis in a year, long term antibiotics can be prescribed, these reduce the risk of having cellulitis. These can be discontinued after a year if no further episodes or may be lifelong.

You need to stop long term antibiotics when taking a 2 week course of antibiotics, then restart them again.

'In-case' Antibiotics

Patients may carry a 2 week course of antibiotics at home or if going on holiday so they can be started immediately symptoms of cellulitis develop. This is at the discretion of your GP.

Leg exercises

A video showing leg exercises can be found on our website:
www.teessidehospice.org/lymphoedema-clinic

Exercise and Movement

Exercise and movement are an important aspect in managing lymphoedema. Exercise helps improve muscular strength, cardiovascular function, limb function, movement, lung capacity and wellbeing.

Gentle resistance exercises stimulate muscle pumps and increase lymphatic flow.

Exercise helps in 4 ways, they:

- Help drain away lymph and reduce swelling
- Maintain or improve flexibility in your joints
- Improve your posture
- Improve your well being

Your exercises will have more effect if they are done when you are wearing your compression garment.

We suggest you do the following specific exercises 2-3 times a day and it may take several weeks to build up to doing each exercise, please do as many as you are able before you experience discomfort/pain.

1. Deep Abdominal Breathing - place your hands on your stomach and keep your shoulders still and relaxed. Take a deep breath in and push your hands out by expanding your abdominal muscles. Breathe out and let your hands return to their original position. Do this 5 times.

2. Tighten and relax your bottom muscles, repeat 10 times if no discomfort/pain occurs.



3. Tighten and relax your knee and thigh muscles, this may be easier if you place a cushion between your thighs and try squeezing it, repeat 10 times if no discomfort/pain occurs.



4. Bend and straighten your legs at the knee, when straightened try tensing and relaxing your thigh muscles, repeat 10 times if no discomfort/pain occurs.



5. Bend and stretch your feet at the ankles, repeat 10 times if no discomfort/pain occurs.



6. Circle feet at ankles both clockwise and anti-clockwise, this can also be done making a circle on the floor with your foot, repeat 10 times if no discomfort/pain occurs.



7. When sitting or standing, raise your heel off the ground then your toes off the ground, repeat 10 times if no discomfort/pain occurs.



8. When sitting or standing, walk on the spot, repeat 10 times if no discomfort/pain occurs.



9. Finish with further deep abdominal breathing 5 times (No. 1).

Advice for leg swelling

1. It is a good idea not to cross your legs when you are sitting
2. Don't sit with your legs down for long periods – either lay with your legs up on a settee or have them fully supported on a footstool with a pillow beneath your knees.
3. Try not to stand still for long periods of time, if you have to stand, do the following exercises to stimulate the pump action of your muscles:
 - Raise yourself up on your toes frequently to tense and relax your calf muscles
 - Shift your weight from one leg to the other and transfer your weight from heels to toes, as if walking on the spot.

Lymphoedema Support and Resources

Lymphoedema Clinic

01642 811068

Patient videos and resources can be found at
www.teessidehospice.org/lymphoedema-clinic

Lymphoedema Support Network (LSN)

Legs Matter

legsmatter.org

British Lymphology Society (BLS)

Lymph Connect (JOBST)

Lymphoedema United

Lipoedema UK / Talk Lipoedema



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Last Review: February 2026
Next Review: February 2029

Registered Charity Number: 512875