A stylized, light green illustration of a human figure from the waist up, showing the lymphatic system. The lymphatic vessels are depicted as a network of thin, branching lines, with several larger, circular nodes (lymph nodes) highlighted in a slightly darker shade of green. The background is a solid, vibrant green.

minimising
the risk
of
developing
lymphoedema

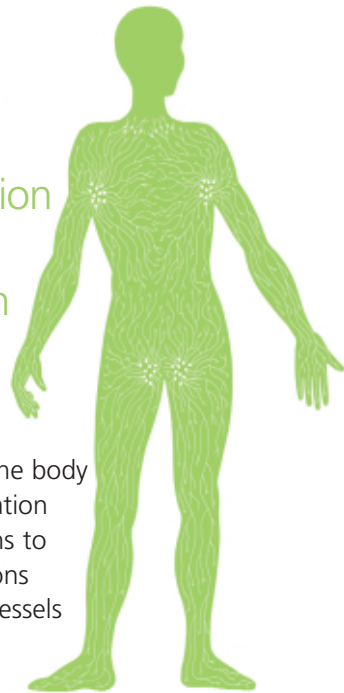
*Surrey, West Sussex and Hampshire
Cancer Network*



What is lymphoedema?

“Lymphoedema is a chronic condition characterised by oedema (swelling) usually of one or more limbs and in some cases involving the trunk, head and genital area.” Moffat et al (2003)

Lymph is a colourless fluid formed in the tissues of the body and normally drains back into the main blood circulation through a network of vessels and nodes. As it returns to the circulation, the lymph passes through filter stations called lymph nodes. Lymph nodes drain into larger vessels in the body which then join the main circulation.



What causes lymphoedema?

Lymph nodes are small and delicate. They can become blocked or damaged, or may be surgically removed as part of your treatment. Damage to vessels and nodes may be caused by scar tissue which forms following injury, infection, surgery and/or radiotherapy for the treatment of cancer.

When normal drainage of lymph does not occur, swelling of the tissues beneath the skin will take place, this is known as lymphoedema.

It is known that people who have lymph node surgery and/or radiotherapy to the lymph nodes do have an increased risk of developing lymphoedema.

Can lymphoedema be prevented?

It is possible to reduce the risk of developing lymphoedema through avoiding injury and minimising the possibility of infection to the part of the body at risk. A positive approach to caring for yourself will help lessen the risk of swelling from occurring.

Sometimes, no matter how careful you are, lymphoedema can still occur. Looking after your skin is important for those at risk of developing lymphoedema. Daily care of the area at risk is a life long commitment.

How to help reduce the risk of infection or injury

Do

- ▲ Treat cuts, grazes and scratches immediately by washing the area well and applying antiseptic solution.
- ▲ Consult your GP if there is a change in the injured area, eg. redness, pain, sudden swelling.
- ▲ Keep your skin clean, drying carefully between the fingers and toes.
- ▲ Moisturise the skin daily using a non-perfumed cream, e.g. aqueous cream.
- ▲ Avoid highly scented skin care products.
- ▲ Use a high factor sun cream, paying attention to all exposed areas.
- ▲ Use insect repellent.
- ▲ Use hair removal cream or an electric razor to shave.
- ▲ Take care when manicuring your nails.
- ▲ See a chiropodist if your nails are difficult to cut.
- ▲ Take care when using tools and wear appropriate protective clothing, eg. gardening gloves.
- ▲ Avoid walking in bare feet.
- ▲ Avoid excessive weight gain.
- ▲ Take some exercise: cycling, swimming or walking are suggested.
- ▲ When travelling, drink plenty of water, wear loose clothing and keep as mobile as possible.

Do not

- ▲ Allow the taking of blood pressure or blood samples, injections or acupuncture on the side of your surgery where practically possible.
- ▲ Wear tight clothing or jewellery on the affected part of the body.
- ▲ Exercise too vigorously.
- ▲ Have any form of vigorous massage.
- ▲ Lift or carry heavy objects.
- ▲ Expose your body to excessive heat, eg. sauna, steam room, hot tub.

Further sources of help

Cancerbackup

3 Bath Place, Rivington Street, London EC2A 3JR

Cancer Information Service: 0808 800 1234

Website: www.cancerbackup.org.uk

Lymphoedema Support Network

Tel: 020 7351 4480

Website: www.lymphoedema.org/lsn

Your local lymphoedema service

If you require any further explanation and advice please contact your local lymphoedema service:



Reference

Moffat CJ, et al (2003), *Lymphoedema: an underestimated health problem*.
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