

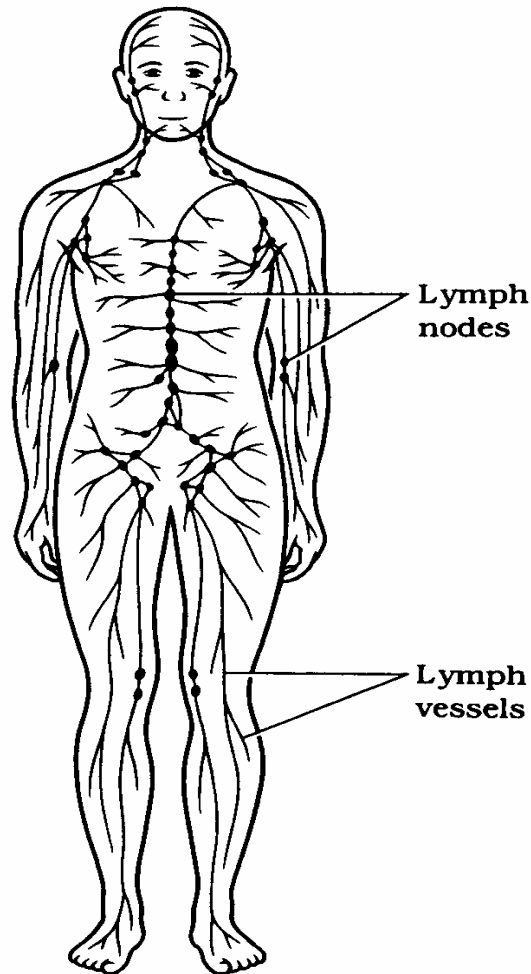
ADVICE FOR PATIENTS AT RISK OF DEVELOPING LYMPHOEDEMA OF THE LEG(S)/TRUNK.

INTRODUCTION.

Lymphoedema is a swelling (oedema) in the tissues, which happens when lymph fluid cannot drain away. Some people develop lymphoedema if they have lymph glands removed during surgery or have had radiotherapy. Although this treatment is essential to cure your cancer it may also damage the lymphatic system. Many people experience no problem at all but some develop a swelling known as lymphoedema.

This may occur immediately after treatment or many years later.

The purpose of this leaflet is to give you information about what lymphoedema is and what you can do to reduce your risk of developing this condition.



THE LYMPHATIC SYSTEM.

In order to understand lymphoedema you need to know a little bit about the lymphatic system.

The lymphatic system is a network of vessels (tubes) and nodes (glands) that cover the body and drain fluid from the tissues into the blood stream. the lymph vesssels collect collect extra fluid, protein and waste material from the body tissues and transport it via the lymph nodes back into the blood. The lymph nodes filter the fluid of any unwanted material and make special cells that help the body fight infection.

WHAT IS LYMPHOEDEMA?

Lymphoedema is a swelling in the tissues below the skin that occurs when the lymphatic fluid cannot drain away. Lymphoedema usually affects the legs but can happen anywhere in the lower half of your body eg abdomen, bottom or genitals. This can happen if the lymphatic system is damaged or blocked. Lymph nodes are removed as part of cancer surgery and this can block the normal drainage pathway. Lymphatic vessels and nodes can also be damaged by the cancer and by the scarring that follows after surgery or radiotherapy. In lymphoedema fluid is dammed behind the blockage and builds up in the surrounding tissues causing swelling.

HOW TO REDUCE YOUR RISK OF DEVELOPING LYMPHOEDEMA.

If you have had surgery to remove the lymph nodes in your abdomen or groin and/or you have had radiotherapy to your abdomen or groin then you are at risk of developing swelling in your legs, abdomen, bottom or genitals.

There are things you can do to reduce this risk.

You need to follow this simple advice for life as lymphoedema may occur any time after treatment.

TRY TO AVOID INFECTION AND INJURY.

The skin is covered in germs and a break in the skin can let germs in. with fewer lymph nodes there is a decreased ability to fight off germs and this can lead to an increased risk of developing an infection in the affected area. So



- Wear long trousers and boots when gardening.
- Wear insect repellent to avoid bites.
- Wear something on your feet at all times.
- Take care when cutting nails.
- Take care whilst shaving. Always use an electric shaver as razors can cut the skin.
- Avoid having injections in your legs, abdomen or buttocks if possible.
- Avoid having acupuncture to your lower body.
- Try to avoid pet scratches.

If you do break the skin wash the area carefully, apply an antiseptic eg, 'savlon', 'germolene', 'tcp' and cover.

Watch for signs of infection: rash, pain, warmth, redness, sudden swelling or fever. If you have any of these symptoms please consult your GP immediately who will prescribe antibiotics. Carry antibiotics with you when you go on holiday in case of infection.

KEEP YOUR SKIN IN GOOD CONDITION.



Try to keep your skin clean, soft and moisturised. Wash with a mild soap that won't dry your skin. After washing dry thoroughly especially between the toes. Apply an unperfumed moisturiser eg aqueous cream to your skin daily.

TRY TO AVOID TIGHT CLOTHING.

- Avoid wearing socks, stockings or underwear with tight elastic.
- Wear comfortable shoes, avoid high heels or tight straps.

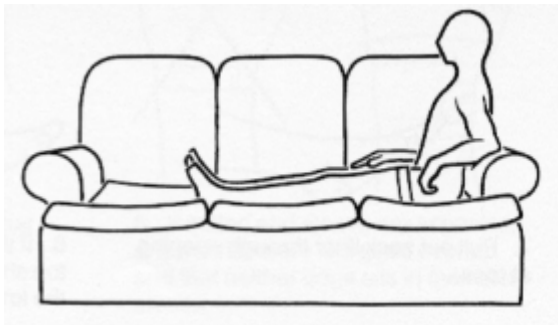


TRY TO AVOID VIGOROUS ACTIVITY.

Exercise is important but don't overdo it!

- Do not overtire legs at risk, if they start to ache, rest.
- Exercises which are recommended include swimming, walking, gentle bike riding.

Whatever exercise you choose build up the amount you do gradually. Use your legs as a guide to how much you can do. It is better not to exercise in the heat of the day and be sure to protect yourself from the sun.



Appropriate positioning of your legs whilst at rest will also lessen the likelihood of swelling occurring. When sitting elevate your legs on a foot stall or along the sofa rather than letting them hang down.



TRY TO AVOID HEAT

- Try to stay in the shade or cover up the affected area.
- Avoid very hot baths or showers, saunas and hot tubs.
- Always wear a high factor sunscreen (SPF 15 or above).
- Avoid heat producing ointments ie 'Deep Heat' or hot water bottles on the affected area.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR.

- A feeling of fullness or pressure.
- A feeling of tightness.
- The sensation of swelling which can often be present even before the swelling is seen.
- Puffiness, swelling, or any increase in size of the leg(s) or anywhere on your abdomen or bottom.
- A bursting sensation.
- Aching or heaviness in your legs, abdomen or buttocks.

There are several reasons other than lymphoedema which may cause swelling. If you notice any of the signs listed above contact your GP, Consultant or Specialist Nurse who can refer you to the lymphoedema clinic if necessary.

USEFUL ADDRESSES.

THE LYMPHOEDEMA SUPPORT NETWORK.
ST LUKES CRYPT
SYDNEY STREET
LONDON
SW3 6NH
Tel: 020 7351 4480
Website: www.lymphoedema.org/ltn
Email: adminltn@lymphoedema.freemove.co.uk

CANCER BACUP
3 BATH PLACE
RIVINGTON STREET
LONDON
EC2A 3DR
Tel: 0808 8001234
Website: www.cancerbacup.org.uk

THE LYMPHOEDEMA CLINIC
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