

Treatment of Lymphoedema

Definition

→ Lymphoedema is excessive interstitial fluid with high protein concentration associated with chronic inflammation.
It is progressive and if left untreated may become gross and debilitating.

Features

→ Swollen limb / area which may feel tight, progressively less resolution with elevation. Lymphorrhoea
Impaired mobility and function. Heavy, uncomfortable, painful, altered body image

Assess

→ Exclude all other causes of swelling e.g. venous thrombosis, cardiac failure, low protein oedema, drugs e.g. NSAIDs & steroids
If tumour - is it treatable - seek advice
If arterial insufficiency noted or suspected seek vascular assessment

Objectives

→ Lymphoedema cannot be cured but can be controlled
Aim of treatment is to minimise swelling, maximise function and reduce risk of complications such as reduced mobility/function; lymphorrhoea.
Early detection and management achieves the best results

Skin Care

- apply moisturiser e.g. diprobase aqueous cream (lanolin free) to skin after washing
- inspect skin daily for infection and abrasions
- prompt treatment of any wound cover and treat with antiseptic. If limb becomes red or swollen, hot, tender +/- flu like symptoms start antibiotics
- use work gloves e.g. when gardening, washing dishes
- use sunscreen to prevent burns
- use electric razor or depilatory cream on affected area to reduce risk of injury
- avoid venepuncture and blood pressure recordings on affected limbs if possible

Massage

- stimulates lymph flow in the superficial lymph vessels
- patients or their carers can be shown to do simple lymphatic drainage
- manual lymphatic drainage [MLD] performed by one trained in lymphoedema management

Compression

- Shaped tubigrip can be used for soft pitting oedema usually on legs
- compression garments can be used to control lymphoedema.
- garments are initially supplied and fitted by trained professionals [see below]
- garments are measured precisely to predetermined pressure;
- compression garments are worn all day and remove at night
- do not use garments if they cause pain or if any concern regarding arterial supply (seek advice) or if lymphorrhoea (seek advice) or if infection present.

Exercise

- exercise is important since it helps fluid to drain
- gentle active or passive movements
- exercise should be done while wearing elastic support
- support heavy limbs while resting. Slings may be helpful when mobile

Follow-up

- maintenance, monitoring and support

Useful Contacts

Lymphoedema Clinic

70 Commercial Road
Tel. 0141 300 6318

Lymphoedema Sisters
Sr. Todd - 0141 300 6319
Sr. Rice - 0141 300 6320
Sr. Key - 0141 300 6321

New Patient Clinic
Thursday a.m.