

## Compression garments for arm lymphoedema

You have been prescribed a compression garment to help to reduce the lymphoedema in your arm / hand. Compression sleeves and gloves help to limit the amount of fluid building up in your arm and hand. This is because they provide firm support, enabling the muscles to pump fluid away more effectively, and provide more pressure at the hand and wrist than at the top of your arm, encouraging fluid out of the limb where it will drain more easily.

### When do I wear it?

- Wear your sleeve / glove every day to control the swelling in your arm / hand.
- Put your garment on as soon as possible after getting up in the morning.
- Take the garment off before bedtime unless otherwise instructed by your therapist.

We appreciate that in hot weather garments can be uncomfortable, but unfortunately this is when it is important to wear it as the heat can increase the swelling.

If you would like to leave your garment off for a special occasion, we would advise that you minimise this and put your garment on as soon as possible again afterwards. Sometimes wearing your garment at night may help control your swelling but we would not routinely recommend this.

### What should I look out for?

Your garment should feel firm but not uncomfortable, it is normal to have to adjust it throughout the day, but if this is frequent then it may not be the correct fit.

- If you notice the garment is rubbing or cutting in, adjust the garment or remove it and reapply it.
- If your garment feels tight during the day, try and think about what may have caused this. If you have been busy, sit down and elevate your arm and rest for at least 30 minutes. If you have been resting, do some exercises to move your arm.
- If you have been given a sleeve but not a glove or hand piece and you notice your hand is swelling, please remove the sleeve and contact the clinic.
- If you experience pins and needles or numbness in your arm or hand, or you notice your fingers are abnormally cold or dusky in colour, initially adjust your garment to ensure it is not cutting in and stopping your circulation, and try to exercise the affected arm and hand. **If the problem persists remove the garment and contact the clinic.**

### How do I put on the garment?

#### Do:

- take your time. Make sure that the compression is evenly applied and excess fabric is not left to sit in your elbow crease.
- fold the sleeve in half to make it easier to get it on over your hand and forearm.
- make sure that there are no wrinkles or folds in the fabric. Rubber gloves are useful to smooth out wrinkles by spreading the excess up or down and to protect the hosiery from long nails or jewellery.

#### Don't:

- overstretch the material when putting a garment on, as this will damage the hosiery and once stretched the garment will be too long for you. The garment should usually sit over the bone at your wrist and come to 2 fingers width below your armpit.

- allow the top of your garment to roll down or double up as this will act as a tourniquet.
- fold your garment over at the top or at the wrist. If you feel the garment is too long please contact the clinic.

If you or your carer find application or removal of hosiery difficult, there is a variety of aids that can be trialled at a fitting appointment with the Lymphoedema Technician

### **How do I take it off?**

- Take your time, steadily take hold of the top of the garment and peel downwards. Take care not to overstretch the material.
- If you wear a separate handpiece do not be tempted to remove just the handpiece during the day (unless you are specifically advised to do so).
- The Sigvaris Advance sleeve needs to be rolled down to avoid over-stretching the silicone topband.

### **How do I care for my skin?**

- Check your skin regularly on removal of your garment for any problems caused by the hosiery or signs of infection.
- It is recommended that you moisturise your affected arm daily at bedtime. This allows the moisturiser to soak into your skin. Moisturiser applied before hosiery application can cause skin irritation, may represent a fire risk, damages the hosiery and makes it more difficult to apply. If you are unable to apply the moisturiser at night then you need to ensure that it has had time to absorb fully before applying the hosiery.

### **How do I care for my garment?**

- Wash daily to restore the garment's elasticity.
- Garments can be hand or machine washed up to 40°C. We recommend a mild detergent. Do not use fabric softener. Dry the garment away from direct heat. You can do this by placing a towel over the radiator and drying the garment on top. Do not tumble dry.
- Wear your garments evenly – don't keep one for best.

Please also refer to the manufacturers instructions.

### **Suggestions to combat irritation:**

- Do not use emollients/lotions where the silicone top-band is going to sit.
- Change the top-band position throughout the day (only a slight move is necessary) - this allows any perspiration beneath the silicone to dry.
- Clean the top-band with a damp cloth (no soap) in order to remove any washing power residue which can cause a reaction.

### **Contact us**

If you have any questions please contact:

#### **Lymphoedema Clinic**

Royal Cornwall Hospital

Mon – Fri 8am – 4pm

Tel 01872 252885 or 252601

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For further information and support please visit our website:

[www.royalcornwall.nhs.uk/services/therapies/occupational-therapy/lymphoedema/](http://www.royalcornwall.nhs.uk/services/therapies/occupational-therapy/lymphoedema/)



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