

Compression garments for leg lymphoedema

You have been fitted with a compression garment to help reduce the lymphoedema in your leg. Compression garments work by limiting the amount of fluid building up in your leg. They provide firm support, enabling the muscles to pump fluid away more effectively. They provide most pressure at the foot and less at the top of the leg so fluid is pushed out of the limb where it will drain away more easily.

When do I wear it?

- Wear your garment every day to control the swelling in your leg.
- Put your garment on as soon as possible after getting up in the morning. This is because as soon as you stand up and start to move around extra fluid goes into your leg and it begins to swell.
- 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:

- If you notice the garment is rubbing or cutting in, you may need to adjust the garment throughout the day; this can usually be managed when visiting the toilet.
- 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 leg and rest for at least 30 minutes. If you have been resting, either walk around or do some exercises.
- If you experience:
 - pins and needles or numbness in your foot or leg, or
 - you notice your toes are abnormally cold or dusky in colour

initially try to exercise the affected leg or change your position at rest. **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 ankle crease or behind your knee.
- make sure that there are no wrinkles or folds in the fabric. Rubber gloves are useful to smooth out wrinkles and protect the hosiery from long nails or jewellery.
- make use of the carpet or a rubber mat to help position the foot section correctly by sliding your foot along the floor.

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. A below knee garment should sit just below your knee crease and not in the knee crease itself. A full leg garment should sit just below your groin crease at the top of your thigh.

- 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. If you feel the garment is too long please contact the clinic.

If you or your carer find application/removal of the hosiery difficult, there are a variety of useful 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. Again, make use of the carpet or a rubber mat to move the fabric down over your foot.

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 apply emollient to the affected leg daily at bedtime. This allows the emollient to soak into the leg. Emollient applied before hosiery application can cause skin irritation, damages the hosiery and makes it more difficult to apply. If you are unable to apply the emollient at night then you need to ensure that it has had time to absorb fully before applying the hosiery, otherwise it can represent a fire risk. Some emollients are suitable for application prior to putting on your hosiery such as Doublebase Gel.

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.

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 manufacturer's instructions.

Contact us

If you have any questions please contact the Lymphoedema clinic on 01872 252601 or email: rch-tr.lymphoedema@nhs.net

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690