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The Lymphoedema Service

What is this?

The Lymphoedema Service at the Royal Cornwall Hospital provides specialist assessment and treatment for children and adults with lymphoedema of any cause, and also women with lipoedema. Following assessment, we are able to provide a range of treatments tailored to the individual, alongside self-management techniques. Our aim is to improve the lymphoedema symptoms helping patients to understand their condition and learn how to manage it themselves.

The Lymphoedema Service is in the Therapy Department, Princess Alexandra Wing, Royal Cornwall Hospital, Treliske, Truro.

What can I expect at my first appointment?

Your initial appointment will take between 1-2 hours. You will be seen by one of the Lymphoedema Therapists who will assess you and aim to give a diagnosis. You will be asked to undress so that the therapist can examine the swollen area and also the adjoining area.

You may be asked to get onto a couch to enable the therapist to assess you. If you have difficulty getting in and out of a chair or bed or need special equipment to help you, please let the clinic know before attending your appointment.

If you think you would like someone else to be present you may bring your own friend, family member or carer or ask us to provide a chaperone for you.

At the end of your initial assessment we will agree a treatment plan. Treatment will rarely be started at this initial appointment and you will need to return to the clinic for further treatment appointments.

What is lymphoedema?

Lymphoedema is a type of swelling that develops because of a build up of fluid in the body's tissues. It occurs as a result of the lymphatic drainage routes being blocked or damaged, which leads to a build up of fluid in the tissues (oedema). It can occur in any part of the body, but is most likely to affect an arm or leg.

Your lymphatic system:

- is made up of groups of lymph nodes throughout the body, which are connected by a network of lymph vessels.
- acts as a one-way drainage system, transporting fluid from the body tissues into the blood circulation
- contains white blood cells called lymphocytes which fight infection
- gets rid of waste products from the tissues.

If part of your lymphatic system becomes damaged or blocked, fluid cannot drain effectively and can build up, causing swelling.

There are two types of lymphoedema:

- **primary lymphoedema** – some people are born without sufficient lymphatics, so the system cannot work effectively. The swelling may develop in childhood or as an adult.
- **secondary lymphoedema** – this may be as a result of damage to the lymphatic system caused by treatment for cancer, infection, injury or burns. It can also be as a result of problems with your veins, obesity or immobility of a limb due to other medical conditions.

Can it be treated?

Lymphoedema is a long-term condition as the lymphatic system cannot be repaired, so any damage to it will be permanent. However, it can usually be reduced with treatment and ongoing self-management.

The aim of treatment is to improve fluid drainage, thereby reducing the swelling and keeping it under control.

Treatment may include:

- skin care
- compression garments
- exercise
- maintaining a healthy weight
- manual lymphatic drainage (a specialised form of massage)
- learning how to manage it yourself.

What is Lipoedema?

Lipoedema is an adipose tissue disorder that is characterised by abnormal fat deposition and tenderness of the lower limbs.

Can it be treated?

Lipoedema is a long-term condition and there is currently no cure. However the symptoms can be managed and further complications reduced with treatment and on-going self management.

Contact us

If you have any questions please contact:

Lymphoedema Clinic

Mon – Fri 8am – 4pm
Tel 01872 252885 or 252601
rch-tr.lymphoedema@nhs.net

For further information and support please visit our website:

www.royalcornwall.nhs.uk/services/therapies/occupational-therapy/lymphoedema/

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

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