



## Lymphoedema Department

# Hints to Prevent Chronic Leg Oedema

This leaflet explains what you need to do to look after your legs, and help prevent you from developing leg oedema.

### Skin Care

Dry, flaky skin and dirty feet can harbour bacteria, which can cause infection/cellulitis. To help prevent this:

- Wash your legs and feet thoroughly every day, taking extra care to wash and dry between the toes. Use wipes or a flannel to exfoliate and remove any dead skin
- Soaking softens plaques of dry skin. Remove with gentle friction using a loofah, flannel or net ball. Any dead skin and build-up of creams must be removed daily
- Avoid athlete's foot by drying carefully between each toe
- Treat athlete's foot daily with anti-fungal cream between the toes and, at the same time, put anti-fungal powder in your shoes and slippers
- Recognise dry skin and moisturise daily, preferably at night to allow time to absorb
- Avoid any creams which contain lanolin as it can cause irritation
- Keep the inside of your shoes and slippers clean.

### Exercise

Keeping active and doing regular exercise helps to control swelling. When the muscles move they produce a pumping action on the blood and lymph vessels, helping to send fluid away from the tissues and back into the general system. When there is no movement there is no pumping action. When there is no pumping action, there is no movement of fluid back to the heart from the feet. Fluid will then accumulate at the lowest level, the feet and legs:

- Moving your ankles is the most important thing you can do to stop the ankles swelling, so keep your feet and ankles moving. If you have difficulty, perhaps there is someone who can help you with passive exercises
- Do as much walking as possible, little and often is better than one long walk. Set yourself some targets. Make it enjoyable. Enlist the help of a Physiotherapist if necessary.

### Elevation

Gravity plays a significant part in where the fluid settles. It will go to the lowest levels, your feet and ankles:

- Sit with your legs up to hip height when you are not walking around.

## If you wear support or compression stockings

They help prevent the accumulation of fluid, enhance muscle propulsion and protect the limbs. Make sure you:

- Wear clean garments daily
- Apply them before getting out of bed in the morning
- Use a stocking applicator to apply if required
- Wear rubber gloves to distribute weave of the garment
- Avoid leaving wrinkles or bunching around the joints, thus reducing discomfort
- Remove before retiring to bed
- Avoid sitting with your legs down

## Weight Control

If you are overweight, it will affect your ability to control the swelling in your legs and may make them worse. If you can reduce your weight, it would be helpful in the long-term management.

## Contact Numbers:

We hope that you have found this information useful. If you have any questions or are worried about anything, please speak to the following Dorset County Hospital Staff:

Lymphoedema Nurses:   EMMA DIAZ                           01305 255370  
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## About this leaflet:

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If you have feedback regarding the accuracy of the information contained in this leaflet, or if you would like a list of references used to develop this leaflet, please email [pals@dchft.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@dchft.nhs.uk)



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