



Lymphoedema Department

Medical Tape and Lymphoedema Management

This leaflet explains what medical tape is, how it works and how it can be used in the treatment and management of lymphoedema.

What is Medical Tape and how does it work?

Medical Tape is constructed with 100% cotton, coated with a medical grade adhesive, with the added benefit of elastic properties. It was originally designed to be used for sporting injuries, however, it was also found to be beneficial in the management of lymphoedema. When applied correctly, the tape is designed to gently lift the skin and encourage lymphatic drainage, away from an area of congestion (high pressure), towards an area free from oedema (low pressure), and onwards to working lymph nodes, 24 hours a day.

What can it be used for?

- To aid superficial lymphatic drainage away from an area of congestion
- To support muscles, assisting deeper lymphatic drainage
- To soften scar tissue (adapted application)
- To soften areas of thickened tissue (fibrosis)

Here is a brief (but by no mean exhaustive) list of areas of oedema where Medical Tape can be applied:

- Breast/chest
- Face/head/neck
- Genital area
- Hands/fingers/toes/feet
- Arm or leg underneath bandaging during intensive treatment

Allergies

Occasionally some people can have an allergic reaction to medical tape. Your clinician will usually apply a small patch test of tape to be left in place for 24 hours. If there is any skin reaction noted during the patch test or subsequent treatment, the tape should be removed and sensitive tape applied instead during treatment. It should be noted that if the tape is applied with too much stretch, or removed with too much force, the skin may temporarily become red due to this rather than an allergy.

How is it applied?

Before application of tape, the skin needs to be clean, dry and free from moisturisers/talcum powder. If the area is very hairy, clipping or careful shaving (ideally with an electric shaver) is recommended as tape does not stick well on hair.

The tape will be cut to the size and shape required (this is individual to you) and your clinician will usually ask you to adopt certain positions to gain the optimum stretch of your skin. Once this is obtained, the tape will be applied to the skin, usually with no stretch to the tape. The adhesive is heat activated, therefore the tape will be gently rubbed with the hand to ensure effective adherence. Depending on the reason for application, the tape can be applied at full/partial stretch. Your clinician will assess the application method at each appointment.

How long does it stay on for?

Generally the tape will be left in place for approximately five days, and then gently removed by you, leaving the skin to rest for a further one or two days before re-application. Skin can be washed and moisturised as usual in the two rest days, however, **do not** apply moisturiser before the tape is re-applied.

Tape should be gently removed in the direction of hair growth. This is sometimes easier after a bath or shower when the skin is moist. A course of four to six weekly treatment sessions will usually be booked. If the treatment period needs to be extended to more long-term, your clinician may teach you or a family member how to apply the tape.

Is there anything you should avoid?

The adhesive is heat activated, therefore avoid any artificial heat sources near the tape (eg hand driers if the tape is on your hands/arms, or heat pads etc) as this can cause the tape to stick too well!

Is the tape water resistant?

Yes it is water/splash resistant. You can shower as normal and gently pat dry with a towel afterwards. If the tape begins to curl at the edges, gently pat into place and let your natural body heat re-activate the adhesive. Please avoid soaking the taped area in the bath or swimming pool as this may affect adherence.

When or where should you not use Medical Tape?

- Over areas of broken, fragile or thin skin
- Over areas of acute infection (cellulitis)
- Over an open wound
- If you have an allergy to the tape
- Over areas of reduced sensitivity (where you would not notice an allergic reaction)

