

SKIN CARE

The skin is the body's first line of defense. It protects the body from trauma and infection and aids in temperature regulation. Therefore it is essential to keep the skin healthy. Individuals, who have had any impairment of the lymphatic system, are especially at risk for developing an infection. Any small cut or abrasion can allow bacteria to enter the skin and the stagnant lymphatic fluid is a perfect medium in which bacteria can grow. People who already have lymphedema, diabetes, or vascular disease are at greater risk for developing infections.

Simple measure, which will promote healthy skin:

1. **Inspect** the skin daily for any cracks, cuts or dry areas and insect bites. Check areas of reduced sensation carefully, and any skin folds for redness or broken skin.
2. **Clean** skin daily with a non-perfumed soap.
3. **Dry** skin completely, especially the area between toes, and skin folds.
4. **Keep** skin supple. Use a low pH lotion such as Eucerin or Nivia to keep skin moist and pliable. (Use an upward motion when applying) Apply an antibacterial cream to any opening of the skin.
5. **Check** fingernails and toenails for cracks, fungus, torn cuticles and ingrown toenails.

Arm: Make a fist and check between knuckles for increased swelling
Check your armpit in the mirror for ingrown hair follicles. (white pimples and redness)

Leg: Check behind anklebone for increased swelling

CARE OF YOUR BANDAGES

Proper care of your bandages and garments are important so that they may remain in good condition and provide the proper compression.

1. All bandages (tubular, short or long stretch) should be washed every 2-3 days, or more frequently in warm weather.
2. Bandages can be washed in cold or lukewarm water using a mild liquid detergent. Powder soap can cling to the bandages and cause irritation to the skin.
3. Place the bandages in a lingerie bag for washing. They can become entangled inside the washer and a mess to straighten out!
4. Dry bandages in the dryer on delicate or permanent press setting. Avoid the high heat settings or direct sunlight.
5. Avoid ironing or cutting bandages.
6. The bandages should be rolled up tightly after you remove them from your limb or when they are dry after washing.
7. Do not use the clips to fasten the bandages as the clips make holes in the bandages. Use a silk cloth to hold the bandages securely in place or masking tape.
8. Bandages should be replaced every 3-6 months.

Garments

1. Wash garments per manufacturer's instructions.
2. Wash with mild detergent. Do not use "Woolite" or fabric softener as these products relaxes the elastic fibers of the garment.
3. Garments should be replaced every 3-4 months to provide the necessary compression.

FOOT CARE FOR THE AT RISK PATIENT

People, who have lymphedema of the lower extremity, diabetes or vascular disease are at greater risk for infection.

Helpful hints:

1. Wear white socks. The dye from colored socks can be picked up by the lymph system.
2. Wear well fitting shoes and clean socks daily.
3. To care for corns and calluses, do not use over the counter medications such as Dr. Scholl's corn pads as they contain acid. After the bath or shower, when the skin is softened, buff the skin to remove the dead skin and soften calluses.
4. Corns can develop between the 4th and 5th toes as the foot swells. Changing to larger or wider shoes may alleviate the development of corns. Use lambs wool in-between the toes to reduce friction.
5. When you trim your toenails, round the edges with an emery board to prevent ingrown toenails. Boil clippers or scissors for one minute and let cool before using. If you are unable to cut your toenails, see a Podiatrist regularly.
6. To reduce the risk of developing a fungal infection, dry your feet and between the toes after bathing. You can dilute 1 tsp of vinegar to 1 gallon of water to make a foot soak. The vinegar footbath inhibits the growth of fungus. Do not use alcohol on your feet as alcohol can be drying for the skin. Moisturize the skin of your feet and legs using a low pH, nonscented cream or lotion.

LYMPHEDEMA OF THE LEG (S) / LOWER TORSO

PRECAUTIONS AND PREVENTION

The following tips/suggestions are offered to help you prevent or reduce the risks of developing an infection of the leg(s). Infection is a major concern for people who have lymphedema. An infection can begin with no known reason and quickly spread up the leg(s). Ask your doctor for a prescription for antibiotics to have on hand.

- Absolutely do not ignore any slight increase of swelling in the toes, foot, and ankle.
- Never allow an injection or drawing of blood from the affected leg(s).
- Keep the swollen, or “at risk” leg, spotlessly clean. Moisturize with unscented lotions or creams after bathing. When drying, be gentle and thorough. Dry in the creases and between toes.
- Do not wear socks or stockings with tight elastic bands.
- Avoid extreme temperature changes when bathing, (no sauna or hot tub). Keep the legs protected from the sun.
- Avoid trauma to the limb: bruising, cuts, sunburn or other burns, sports injuries, insect bites, and pet scratches.
- When manicuring your toenails, do not cut your cuticles and round the edges of nails that are cut straight across.
- Exercise is important. Appropriated exercises will be given to you. Do not fatigue your leg(s). Recommended exercises include: walking, swimming, light aerobics, bike riding, and yoga.
- Avoid vigorous, repetitive movements against resistance with the affected leg(s)
- When traveling by air, wear a compression stocking. Additional bandages may be required on a long flight.
- Use an electric razor to remove hair from the leg(s). Maintain razor properly, replacing heads as needed

LYMPHEDEMA OF THE ARM (S)/ UPPER TORSO

PRECAUTIONS AND PREVENTION

The following tips/suggestions are offered to help you prevent or reduce the risks of developing an infection of the arm(s). Infection is a major concern for people who have lymphedema. An infection can begin with no known reason and quickly spread up the arm(s). Ask your doctor for a prescription for antibiotics to have on hand.

- Absolutely do not ignore any slight increase of swelling in the arm, hand, fingers or chest wall.
- **Never** allow an injection, drawing of blood or blood pressure to be taken in the affected arm (s).
- Keep the swollen or “at risk” arm, spotlessly clean. Use lotions without dyes or perfumes after bathing.
- Avoid heavy lifting with the affected arm. Refrain from carrying heavy handbags or bags with over the shoulder straps.
- Do not wear tight jewelry or elastic bands around affected fingers or arm(s)
- Avoid any type of trauma (e.g., bruising, cuts, sunburn or other burns, sports injuries, insect bites, pet scratches.)
- Wear gloves while doing housework, gardening, or any type of work that could result in even a minor injury.
- Use an electric razor to remove hair from the armpit. Maintain razor properly, replacing heads as needed
- When manicuring your nails, do not cut your cuticles.
- When traveling by air you should wear a compression sleeve. Additional bandages may be required on a long flight. (Check with your therapist)
- Wear a well-fitted compression sleeve during all waking hours. At least every 3-6 months see your therapist for follow up. If the sleeve is too loose, most likely the circumference of the arm has reduced, or the sleeve is worn and should be replaced.
- Exercise is important. Your therapist will give you specific exercises to do. Do not over tire your arm. If it starts to ache, lie down and elevate the arm(s).

Recommended exercises are walking, swimming, light aerobics, bike riding, ballet and yoga. Do not lift more than 6 pounds.

- Avoid vigorous, repetitive movements against resistance with the affected arm (e.g., scrubbing, pushing, or pulling).
- **Important:** If you notice a rash, blistering, redness, heat in the arm, or fever, contact your physician.
- Maintain your ideal weight through a well balanced, low sodium, high fiber diet. Avoid smoking (affects circulation) and alcoholic beverages (fluid retention and affects liver function). Lymphedema is a high protein edema, but eating too little protein will not reduce the protein in the tissues.
- Carry a first aid kit with you at all time, this includes: alcohol wipes, Aquaphor and Band-Aids.