

What should I do next?

Even if you don't have exactly the symptoms described in this leaflet, if you have any concerns about the condition of your legs or feet you should have them professionally assessed. In the first instance, speak to your doctor, nurse or local Leg Club, who will give you a thorough examination. This may include a full health check and review of the circulation in your legs.

What is a Leg Club?

Leg Clubs are a research-based initiative which provide community-based treatment, health promotion, education and ongoing care for people of all age groups who are experiencing leg-related problems.

The Leg Club nursing teams are employed by NHS local provider services, CCGs and GP consortia and the nurses incorporate the Leg Clubs into their everyday practice.

No appointment is required and the Leg Club opening hours should be available from the local surgery, community nurses' office, and adverts in the local parish magazine and village shops or from the Leg Club website www.legclub.org

Through education, ongoing advice and support from your Leg Club nurses, you will be made aware that care and prevention of recurrence of leg-related problems is for life.

Visit your nearest Leg Club

The Lindsay Leg Club Foundation
Ipswich, PO Box 689, IP1 9BN

Telephone

01473 749565

Email:

lynn.bullock@legclubfoundation.com

www.legclub.org

Lymphoedema Made Easy

What is Lymphoedema?

Lymphoedema made easy



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What is lymphoedema?

Lymphoedema is a condition where lymphatic fluid (lymph) accumulates within the tissues, resulting in swelling of body parts, especially the limbs, as a result of reduced lymphatic transportation.

There are possibly 200,000 people in the UK with lymphoedema although some are suffering without knowing that they have the problem and remain undiagnosed.

What is the lymphatic system?

The lymphatic system is a one way drainage system which transports fluid and waste products from the tissues back into the circulatory system. It is the system that is concerned with our immunity and fluid regulation in the tissues, helping us to fight infection.

Lymph is the fluid within the lymphatic system which contains many white blood cells, which are released from the lymph nodes when the body is fighting an infection. You may be able to feel these nodes either in your neck or armpits when you are not feeling well.

Why does lymphoedema develop?

There are different reasons why the lymphatic system fails, ultimately the lymphatic system is unable to filter fluid as normal, which results in a swelling.

Swelling present from birth, is known as primary lymphoedema, as faulty genes affect the development of the lymphatic system. However, this may develop later on in life and still be diagnosed as a primary lymphoedema.

Secondary lymphoedema tends to develop as a result of injury, following an operation or treatment for cancer, infection, or lack of limb movement.

Lymphoedema can affect any part of the body but is most common in limbs.

Symptoms of lymphoedema

Symptoms of lymphoedema can include an aching, heavy feeling in affected body parts, difficulty in moving them and problems with fitting into shoes



Fig. 1

or clothes. Symptoms can vary from mild swelling (fig. 1), to more complex lymphoedema, with skin changes (fig. 2), which is usually caused when treatment has not been initiated.

Diagnosis

Lymphoedema is diagnosed following a clinical assessment by a specialist, where you will be examined and have your medical history taken. Your specialist may choose to refer you for further tests, within the hospital setting to confirm diagnosis.

Treating lymphoedema

There is no cure for lymphoedema but the symptoms can be controlled to prevent the condition from worsening. Treatment is provided by lymphoedema specialists or tissue viability and community nurses with a specialist interest in lymphoedema.

Fig. 2



The mainstay of treatment in lymphoedema is compression therapy. This either involves specialist lymphatic compression bandaging, velcro wrapping systems or compression hosiery. Treatment follows a 2 phase approach where bandages will be used to reduce the size of the limb, if required, in the initial phase, then compression garments will be prescribed to maintain the limb in the management phase. Compression garments are available in a variety of fabrics, styles and colours, either custom made or from a sized range.

Compression therapy will maintain the shape of the limb, preventing rebound and minimise the risk of cellulitis. These garments should always be worn as prescribed. There are specialist tools to help the wearer to apply and remove the stockings.

Taking good care of the skin (see leaflet on Skin Care), moving and exercising regularly, having a healthy diet and lifestyle are vital management of lymphoedema.

There are other treatments available in many specialist clinics, used to treat lymphoedema, such as manual lymphatic drainage, a massage technique to stimulate the lymphatic system. Similar is also achieved through the use of compression pumps. Other treatments include light therapy, deep oscillation therapy and negative pressure therapy.

If there is any swelling of the lower limb, then a visit to your local Leg Club would ensure the correct diagnosis is either made or sought from the appropriate person who can diagnose the condition and treat. They would also advise on how to avoid the condition developing or worsening and would continue the care following diagnosis. Log on to www.legclub.org/about-leg-clubs to find the nearest Leg Club (no appointment is required) or ring **01473 749565**.