**Initial advice for patients who have been referred to the Lymphoedema Service and are awaiting an appointment**

The Lymphoedema Service for Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire is a Nurse led service based at Portishead. We currently have clinics at Portishead and Cossham Hospital in Kingswood.

A treatment plan will be developed with you, and you will be taught how to self-manage your condition with the support of the Lymphoedema service.

Your self-management plan will consist of an individually tailored combination of some or all of the following: **skin care, exercise, compression and lymphatic drainage.**

There is much that you can do to start the process whilst you are waiting for your appointment

If you are overweight you should endeavour to reduce your weight to within a normal BMI range as this will potentially contribute to reduction in your lymphoedema symptoms.

Whilst waiting for an appointment you can contact the Lymphoedema Support Network, there is plenty of advice and guidance for patients on their website <https://www.lymphoedema.org>

**Skin Care**

Skin care in the areas that are swollen is vital to reduce the incidence of cellulitis, stop dryness and reduce further skin breakdown. The following regime is suggested.

**Clean the skin**

* The area should be washed carefully at least once a day using an appropriate emollient. Dry the skin gently patting rather than rubbing, paying particular attention to any skin folds and between the fingers/toes.

**Observe the skin**

* Look for signs of redness, or injury. Fungal infections may also be present which will require prompt treatment.
* If skin damage is found, ensure area is clean, apply an antiseptic and check regularly. You should seek prompt medical attention if you experience any symptoms of cellulitis (Skin infection).

**Moisturise the skin**

* The area should be moisturised each night with an appropriate emollient.
* If skin feels normal use of a bland emollient will be adequate. If skin is dry and scaly it is vital the skin is moisturised more intensely- use a soap substitute for washing and a cream or ointment to moisturise to help rehydrate the skin.

**Exercise**

Regular exercise helps to control swelling, keeps joints flexible, improves posture and balance, helps to control weight and can induce a sense of wellbeing.

**What sort of exercise should I be doing?**

Exercise usually has a very positive impact on lymphoedema and is encouraged because muscle activity helps to promote lymphatic drainage.

The sort of exercise or movement that you can do will depend on your age, general fitness, mobility, and co-morbidities.

Movements have a more effective pumping effect when they are done slowly and smoothly but any movement will be beneficial. Deep breathing exercises also stimulate and improve fluid flow through the veins and lymph vessels.

* You can carry out exercises/movements that are within your level of ability – it is always better to start slowly and build up
* No movement or exercise should cause pain
* Do not engage in movement/exercise if you are being treated for cellulitis/infection
* If your swelling increases after an activity you may be overdoing it –try doing a little less for a while and then build up again gradually

**Compression**

Compression therapy is the mainstay management of chronic oedema/lymphoedema.

You should expect to be measured for compression garments at your lymphoedema assessment. It will be expected that you will be able to put on and remove your garments daily (every day), the service can assist with provision of application aids, but cannot provide a garment fitting service.

**Lymphatic Drainage**

Lymphatic drainage is a specialist, gentle type of medical massage.

Following assessment, it may (if appropriate) be used as part of your lymphoedema treatment.

NB. If you have active cellulitis/infection, you should not carry out massage.