

# LYMPHOEDEMA SELF MANAGEMENT.

## 4. COMPRESSION GARMENTS.

The wearing of a special compression garment (for example a compression sleeve for arms, or stockings for legs) is an essential part of managing lymphoedema for most people.

It is imperative for the correct size of garment to be worn and measured for by a trained lymphoedema practitioner.

### **Compression garments are designed to:**

- Prevent the accumulation of fluid in the tissues.
- Encourage fluid to drain from the limb to the trunk.
- Enhance muscle contractions during movement and exercise, to pump fluid through the lymph system more effectively.
- Protect the limb from trauma.

### **Guidelines for Compression garments**

- All garments are supplied with manufacturers' guidelines to be followed regarding their care.
- Garments have a use life of six months (a year for velcrowraps) after which time the garment will start to lose its compression and will no longer effectively support the area of lymphoedema.
- Garments are supplied in pairs so that they can be alternated on a wash / wear basis.
- All garments should be worn daily and then washed before the next wear this is to enable the garment to return to its full elasticity.
- Garments can be machine washed in a gentle 30°C cycle with a mild detergent, DO NOT add fabric conditioner as this can damage the fabric.
- Dry the garment away from direct heat sources such as direct sunlight, radiators and do not tumble dry as this will damage the fabric.
- Do not iron, dry clean or bleach.
- Try and avoid damaging the garment on sharp objects, do not cut any threads as this may cause runs or holes in the garment and affect its compression.
- Some people keep spare 'old' garments if working in the garden or occasions when the garment may get dirty. They then replace this with their clean, undamaged garment when their work is done.
- Compression garments should be firm and provide enough pressure and give the strongest support at the hand or foot so that fluid is pushed away from the limb and towards the body.
- The garment should cover all of the swollen area; this may involve wearing more than one garment.
- It should feel comfortable to wear.

### **How to Apply your Compression Garment**

- The garment should be applied every morning and removed before going to bed at night.
- Donning / Doffing aids are available to help with getting your garment on and off, please discuss this with your lymphoedema therapist.
- To put on turn sleeve or stocking inside out leaving the hand or foot section within the remainder of the garment.

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- Push your hand or foot inside the garment and then ease the rest of the garment up a little at a time.
- It may be useful to wear rubber gloves (e.g. dishwashing gloves) to help grip and then smooth the garment on, so there are no wrinkles or creases left.
- Creases or wrinkles in the garment are to be avoided as they may cause too much pressure and restrict flow, leading to more swelling.
- Compression garments should be comfortable, firm and supportive. If the garment causes tingling, numbness, pain or if you notice your fingers or toes turning blue, the garment should be removed immediately, and advice sought from the person who measured you for the garment.
- Apply moisturising cream at night after you have removed your garment.