

Lymphoedema Awareness, 'Sock It' Campaign

What is lymphoedema?

Lymphoedema (pronounced limf-o-dee-ma), sometimes called chronic oedema, is a swelling caused by having too much fluid in the cells. Usually it happens in the arms or legs but it can be anywhere in the body. The swelling does not go away even if the person rests or takes water tablets. There is no cure but a lot can be done to help people who have it.

Who can get lymphoedema?

More than 200,000 people in the United Kingdom live with lymphoedema and they can be men, women or children of any age and from any race or background.

Why does lymphoedema happen?

Our lymphatic system controls the amount of fluid and protein in our cells and is our body's waste disposal system dealing with germs, waste and even cancer cells. When it is not working properly fluid builds up, a bit like when a river is dammed and a flood happens. There are two different kinds of lymphoedema:

- **Primary lymphoedema** happens when the lymphatic system does not develop properly, it can run in families and can show at birth or later in life.
- **Secondary lymphoedema** happens when the lymphatic system is damaged or has too much fluid to deal with. Many things can damage the lymphatic system such as infection, burns, severe injury, varicose veins and cancer treatment.

People who have had treatment for cancer can get lymphoedema months or even years after their treatment has finished.

How does having lymphoedema make people feel?

Lymphoedema can be very uncomfortable. The swelling can ache and feel heavy and the skin can get very dry and hard. People with it tell us that they get tired more easily than they did before they had it. It can be hard 'looking different' from other people and finding clothes and shoes that fit can be difficult.

How would someone find out they had lymphoedema?

Most people will go to their GP first; they may do some blood tests and other checks to make sure the swelling is not being caused by something else. If they think it is lymphoedema they will ask a lymphoedema expert for advice. If a doctor does not know where to send their patient, the Lymphoedema Support Network has a list of all the clinics in the country.

How is lymphoedema treated?

Skin care – the skin needs to be kept in good condition to prevent infection. This means keeping it clean and well moisturised and trying to stop any injury to the swollen area or treating it quickly if it does happen.

Movement – Moving our muscles helps the lymphatic system to 'pump' fluid, it also helps keep us fit and healthy. Any movement or exercise helps. Deep breathing also helps lymphoedema.

Compression – wearing special 'elastic' compression socks, tights, sleeves, gloves or using special bandages supports the swollen area, helps the swelling go down and stops it getting worse.

Healthy weight – If we are too heavy for how tall we are it can mean that we find it hard to move around, get out of breath easily and it also makes it harder for our lymphatic system to work properly. It is important to eat a diet that is balanced and contains plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables.

Lymphatic massage – this gentle form of massage helps move fluid out of the area that is swollen and is performed by specially trained experts. This massage is not always available free of charge. A simple version can be carried out by the person themselves.

What does the Lymphoedema Support Network do to help people with lymphoedema?

The Lymphoedema Support Network (LSN) has information to help people with lymphoedema, it has information leaflets, a website and a telephone help line. It sends out a newsletter four times a year and has paid for two online teaching courses for doctors. The LSN works with others to provide short films to help people understand about lymphoedema and also to help doctors and scientists who are trying to learn more about it.

What does the British Lymphology Society do to help people with lymphoedema?

The British Lymphology Society (BLS) seeks to actively promote professional standards and the study, understanding and treatment of lymphoedema / chronic oedema and is pleased to work with the LSN to support the Sock It Campaign during Lymphoedema Awareness Week 4-10th March 2018.



Please wear odd socks between the 4-10th March 2018 and upload your pictures to social media to help us raise #LymphoedemaAwareness and help us #Sockit to Lymphoedema!

To donate go to www.lymphoedema.org or text LSNS18 followed by your donation amount to 70070