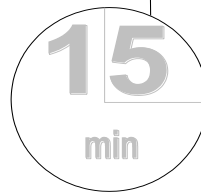


# CLiP

15 minute Worksheet



## Helping patients with symptoms other than pain

### 8: Lymphoedema

(We recommend that you complete worksheet 7: Oedema before this worksheet.)

**Advanced level**

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#### **Aim of this worksheet**

To review the features of lymphoedema and to consider how to help

#### **How to use this worksheet**

- You can work through this worksheet by yourself, or with a tutor.
- Read the case study below, and then turn to the Work page overleaf.
- Work any way you want. You can start with the exercises on the Work page using your own knowledge. The answers are on the Information page - this is not cheating since you learn as you find the information. Alternatively you may prefer to start by reading the Information page before moving to the exercises on the Work page.
- This CLiP worksheet should take about 15 minutes to complete, but will take longer if you are working with colleagues or in a group. If anything is unclear, discuss it with a colleague.
- If you think any information is wrong or out of date let us know.
- Take this learning into your workplace using the activity on the back page.

#### **Case study**

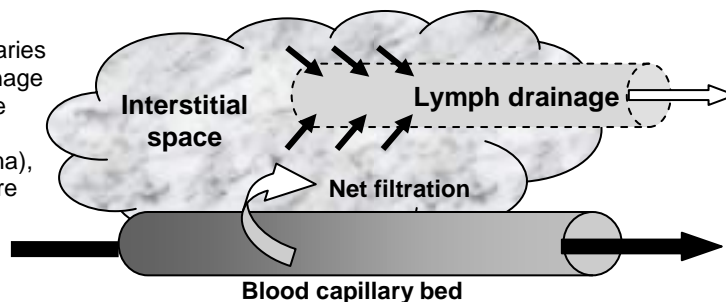
**Mary is a 53 year old woman with cervical carcinoma. Treated with total abdominal hysterectomy, pelvic node dissection and adjuvant radiotherapy (node positive).**

**Approximately 6 months after treatment she noticed increasing swelling of her left leg coming on gradually over about 6 weeks.**

v16

## What is lymphoedema?

In normal conditions, there is a net filtration of fluid out of capillaries into the tissues. Some of the excess fluid is removed by a drainage system called the lymphatics. The build up of excess fluid in the tissues (oedema) occurs whenever the filtration rate exceeds lymphatic drainage. In Lymphoedema (a specific type of oedema), the build up of fluid (lymph) is because the lymphatic vessels are damaged, missing or working inefficiently.



See CLiP Worksheet on *Oedema* for a summary of the mechanisms and causes of oedema.

## Causes of lymphoedema

**Primary lymphoedema:** Absent, insufficient or poorly functioning lymphatics. Many of these are inherited.

They are classified according to the age of onset of the swelling: Congenital (birth to 3 months), Praecox (3 months to 35 years) and Tarda (over 35 years). The Tarda type probably indicates a different underlying cause.

**Secondary lymphoedema:** Damaged or blocked lymphatics are the commonest cause of lymphoedema.

If any cause of oedema is present for long enough, the lymphatics become damaged leading to secondary lymphoedema. This will happen particularly if infection (cellulitis) has been a problem.

Other important causes are cancer (affecting lymph nodes and vessels), treatments e.g. surgery and radiotherapy, local trauma / tissue damage, venous problems, immobility and dependency.

## Identifying lymphoedema

### Clinical Features of Lymphoedema

- Gradual increase in size of limb
- Non pitting oedema in the later stages. (In early stages oedema may be softer and pit easily on digital pressure)
- Normal or paler skin colour
- Thickened skin / Deepened skin folds
- Positive stemmers sign (inability to pick a fold of tissue at the base of the 2<sup>nd</sup> toe)
- Mounds of swelling to dorsum feet/hands

### In severe advancing stages

- Fibrosis (hardening and thickening of skin and subcutaneous tissues)
- Papillomatosis (cobblestone like projections representing dilated skin lymphatics surrounded by fibrosed tissue)
- Lymphangiectasia (also known as Lymphangiomas) (soft fluid filled projections caused by dilatation of lymphatic vessels)
- Lymphorrhoea (leakage of lymph through the skin)
- Hyperkeratosis (build up of horny scales of keratin on the surface of the skin)

### Associated potential problems

- Lymphoedema can impair function and mobility
- Pain – “tightness” or “bursting” from tissue tension, “aching” from joint and muscle strain. Remember other causes of pain
- Increased risk of cellulitis (inflammation and infection involving the skin and subcutaneous tissues)
- Psychosocial problems e.g. altered body and sexual image, low mood and social isolation
- Difficulty in finding suitable clothing and footwear

## Treating lymphoedema

Lymphoedema is a chronic condition that currently cannot be cured but can be controlled and improved with appropriate treatment. Management is aimed at reducing and controlling the lymphoedema and preventing associated complications. 2 phase approach to treatment. The intensive phase comprises skin care, Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD), Multi Layer Lymphoedema Bandaging (MLLB) and exercise. This treatment is therapist led and normally lasts for 2-4 weeks depending on the severity of the oedema. The long term management phase comprises of a daily regime of self care and comprises skin care, Simple Lymphatic Drainage (SLD), compression hosiery and specific exercises. The precise form of management is determined by the site, stage, severity and complexity of the lymphoedema as well as psychosocial factors. A holistic multidisciplinary approach which includes the following four corner stones of treatment is considered the gold standard.

- Skincare – Meticulous hygiene and daily application of non perfumed emollient to prevent or treat the skin changes that can occur with lymphoedema and to prevent potential complications such as cellulitis.
- Lymphatic drainage- aimed at stimulating lymph drainage and reducing congestion at the root of limb and trunk.
  - Manual lymphatic drainage (MLD). Can only be carried out by a trained therapist
  - Simple lymphatic drainage (SLD). A simplified form of massage which can be taught to patients and their carers.
- Compression – Encourages venous and lymphatic drainage by providing support to muscles. Compression can be either in the form of multi-layer lymphoedema bandaging(MLLB) or compression hosiery. It is important that the application of both is undertaken by a competent, trained practitioner.
- Exercise – Promotes lymphatic and venous drainage, improves and maintains range of movement and function. Patients should be advised to wear their compression hosiery or bandages when exercising.

## Where to get advice and treatment

For moderate to severe lymphoedema, specialist clinics are now available in most areas in the UK. Many are attached to hospices, but others are based in NHS hospitals. Contact the British Lymphology Society for more information (see back page). Local palliative care teams often know the site of local lymphoedema clinics (see [www.hospiceinformation.info](http://www.hospiceinformation.info) for the location and contact numbers for all UK palliative care teams).

**Reflect**

Lymphatics are channels that drain fluid from tissues.  
 Think about ways that lymphatics might not be able to do their job  
 Remember that there may be other causes of oedema too. (See worksheet 7)

**Choose**

**Ring** the features which would help you make a  
 clinical diagnosis of lymphoedema

- |                            |                         |                                    |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Difficulty fitting clothes | Increase in limb volume | Thickened skin                     |
| Hard tissues               | Anxiety                 | Infection                          |
| Joint stiffness            | Deep skin folds         | Difficulty pinching up a skin fold |

**Choose**

**Ring** the mechanisms by which these treatments help in the  
 management of lymphoedema

Treatment	How might this help?		
Skin care	↓ skin changes ↑ venous drainage ↓ swelling/volume	Prevent infection ↑ lymphatic drainage	↓ lymphatic congestion Maintain function
Lymphatic Drainage Massage	↓ skin changes ↑ venous drainage ↓ swelling/volume	Prevent infection ↑ lymphatic drainage	↓ lymphatic congestion Maintain function
Compression bandaging / hosiery	↓ skin changes ↑ venous drainage ↓ swelling/volume	Prevent infection ↑ lymphatic drainage	↓ lymphatic congestion Maintain function
Exercise	↓ skin changes ↑ venous drainage ↓ swelling/volume	Prevent infection ↑ lymphatic drainage	↓ lymphatic congestion Maintain function

**Reflect**

Do you know where to get advice on lymphoedema?

## FURTHER ACTIVITY: Lymphoedema

Find out where your nearest lymphoedema clinic is based.

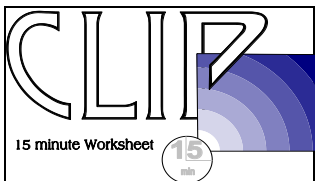
## FURTHER READING: Lymphoedema

### Journal articles

- Badger CM, Peacock JL, Mortimer PS. A randomized, controlled, parallel-group clinical trial comparing multilayer bandaging followed by hosiery versus hosiery alone in the treatment of patients with lymphedema of the limb. *Cancer*. 2000; 88(12):2832-7.
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- Woo PC, Lum PN, Wong SS, Cheng VC, Yuen KY. Cellulitis complicating lymphoedema. *European Journal of Clinical Microbiology & Infectious Diseases*. 2000; 19(4): 294-7.

### Resource books and websites

- A Guide to Symptom Relief in Palliative Care*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Regnard C, Dean M. Oxford: Radcliffe Medical Press, 2010
- Oxford Textbook of Palliative Medicine* 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Hanks G, Cherny NI, Christakis NA, Fallon M, Kaasa S, Prtenoy RK. eds. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2010.
- PCF4- Palliative Care Formulary*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Twycross RG, Wilcock A. [www.palliativebooks.com](http://www.palliativebooks.com)
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**Current Learning in Palliative care**  
An accessible learning programme for health care professionals

### 15 minute worksheets are available on:

- An introduction to palliative care
- Helping the patient with pain
- Helping the patient with symptoms other than pain
- Moving the ill patient
- Psychological and spiritual needs
- Helping patients with reduced hydration and nutrition
- Procedures in palliative care
- Planning care in advance
- Understanding and helping the person with learning disabilities
- The last hours and days
- Bereavement

Available online on  
[www.clip.org.uk](http://www.clip.org.uk)