

# Intensive Lymphoedema Treatment

at St Oswald's Hospice



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You have been referred to the Lymphoedema Clinic at St Oswald's Hospice for a period of intensive treatment for your swollen limb.

### What is Intensive Treatment?

Intensive treatment is known as Decongestive Lymphoedema Therapy (DLT). This treatment is given by a therapist with specialist training. Intensive treatment on a limb can include a bandaging treatment, massage, exercise and skincare.

### Why is the treatment carried out?

DLT is advised if the swelling presents problems regarding size, shape, the quality and 'feel' of the skin or the presence of any swelling on your trunk. For these reasons, it is advisable to reduce the swelling and any associated problems using this special form of treatment, which can achieve rapid improvement.

### How long does the treatment last?

The type of bandaging system you have will determine how often you will need to attend. The treatment sessions are 1 - 1.5 hours and are held daily for two weeks, or twice a week for three weeks (weekdays only).

You will be advised which bandaging system is appropriate for you before you attend your treatment sessions.

### What does the bandaging treatment involve?

The bandaging treatment is made up of a number of layers of padding and a firm outer bandage. The bandages will feel firm when they are first applied. As the day goes on the bandages will begin to feel slacker.

### Where does the treatment take place?

The intensive treatment takes place in the Lymphoedema Clinic at St Oswald's Hospice. All staff are fully trained and the appropriate equipment is available.

### What do I need to bring when I come for treatment?

As the bandage is likely to make your limb bigger, we suggest you wear a loose fitting sleeveless t-shirt if your arm is swollen. If your leg is swollen, a loose fitting pair of trousers (preferably a roomy tracksuit) or a long flowing skirt is advisable.

Each time we take off your bandages your limb will be washed. We would recommend you bring your own towel to clinic if possible. If you aren't able to bring a towel with you we will be able to provide one for you.

It is also worthwhile bringing all the literature you have been given at clinic in case it needs reviewing or updating.

## **What should you do if a problem occurs?**

As a general rule the bandaging treatment should not cause pain, discolouration of the fingers or toes, altered sensation such as pins and needles or numbness. If this occurs, try re-positioning the arm or leg and perform gentle foot and ankle or hand and arm exercises.

If problems persist and your bandages are made up of layers of bandages, try removing one layer at a time until problems resolve. If necessary remove all bandages to relieve symptoms. If this does not help, please contact the Lymphoedema Clinic, Monday to Friday, between 9.00am and 5.00pm, or your GP (evenings and weekends) for further advice.

## **Is exercise important?**

In order for the bandages to help fluid drainage it is important that you move and exercise while wearing bandages. Your therapist will give you a set of exercises to do when wearing the bandages. You are advised to try and use your limb as normally as possible.

## **Skin Care**

Each day when you take off the bandages, your limb will be washed. Before the bandages are reapplied, you will be shown how to moisturise your skin with cream. If some areas of your skin need special treatment, the therapist may use a special cream or dressings.

## **What will you be expected to do while you are having DLT?**

You will be expected to carry out the advice regarding exercise and movement between treatments. It is also advisable to continue with your simple lymphatic drainage massage to encourage the fluid to drain away. When you come for treatment, you will be helped to remove and roll the bandages which are being reapplied. Sometimes we may ask you to take your used bandages home to wash. They should be washed in a gentle wash, patted dry in a towel and dried flat on a towel following manufacturer guidelines.

## **What happens after Intensive Treatment?**

The therapist will monitor and measure your progress regularly and will decide when it is time to move onto the next stage of therapy. This is usually at the end of the two or three week period.

At this point, the course of bandaging will end and you will be supplied with a rigid sleeve or stocking to wear. Once both you and the therapist are happy with your progress, you will be offered a future review appointment.

## How to keep safe during DLT

The bandages may make your limb feel heavy and affect your ability to walk safely if your legs are bandaged.

If we are bandaging your legs and you feel unsafe it is important you tell your Lymphoedema Practitioner as it may be necessary to alter the bandaging system.

You may not be able to wear your normal shoes therefore it is advisable to bring an oversized shoe or slipper to allow you to walk safely and comfortably. We are able to provide adjustable soft shoes if necessary.

It is not recommended that you drive whilst your leg is bandaged. We are able to provide transport if you are unable to get to your appointment. If you do decide to drive, we suggest you inform your insurance company.

For further information about St Oswald's Lymphoedema Service please contact the Lymphoedema team on 0191 246 9050.

This leaflet is available in a range of formats. Please ask a member of our team if you require a different format. Thank you.

We are a registered charity and rely on voluntary donations and legacies to enable us to care for patients and families.

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