

### Physiotherapy Contact Details

St. James's Hospital, Physiotherapy Dept,  
James' St, Dublin 8.



**Physiotherapist:** Gráinne Kerr

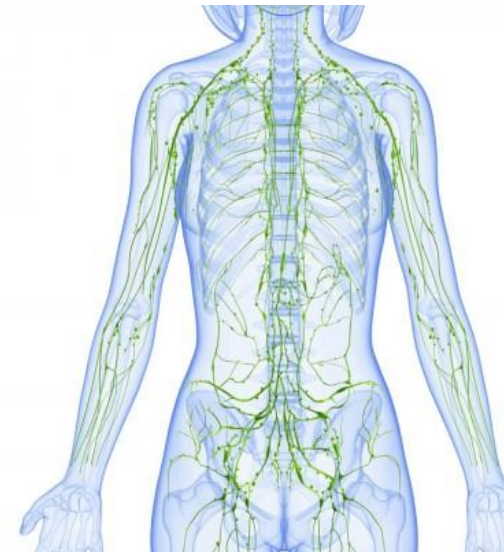


**Physiotherapy Dept:** 01-4162503

**Physiotherapist Mobile:** 087-1490785

**E-mail:** [gkerr@stjames.ie](mailto:gkerr@stjames.ie)

### Lymphoedema Patient Information



**St James's Physiotherapy Department**



## Contents

- *What is the lymphatic system?* 4
- *What is lymphoedema?* 5
- *Signs and symptoms* 7
- *Skincare* 8
- *Physical Activity* 10
- *Garments* 13
- *Self MLD* 14

## Helpful websites

- [lnni.org](http://lnni.org) (Lymphoedema Network Northern Ireland)
- [mldireland.com](http://mldireland.com) (MLD Ireland)
- [lymphireland.com](http://lymphireland.com) (Lymphoedema Ireland)
- <https://www.macmillan.org.uk> (Macmillan Cancer Support)
- <https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/az/l/lymphoedema/treating-lymphoedema.html> (HSE)

## In Summary

**Manage you lymphoedema with:**

1. Skin care
2. Exercise
3. Self-massage
4. Compression garments



Remember to contact your physiotherapist using the details at the front of this booklet should you have any queries or feel your signs or symptoms are changing.

## Helpful Videos:

**Risk Reduction, Healthy Eating, Simple Lymphatic drainage and Exercise available at:**

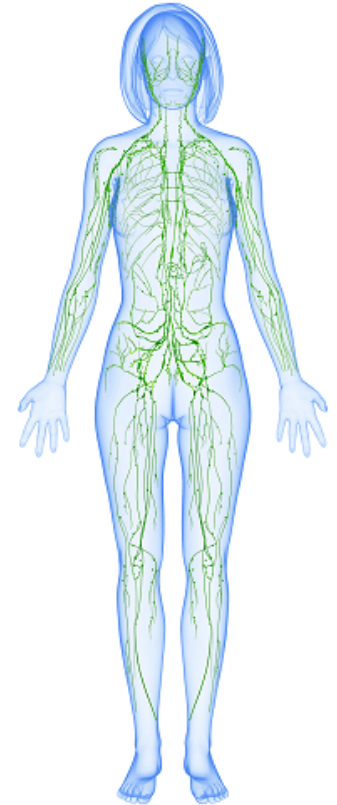
<http://www.medic.video/ire-lymph-risk>

## What is the lymphatic system?

Your lymphatic system plays a significant role in immune function and circulation. It consists of lymph vessels meeting up with lymph nodes located in your neck, armpits and groin.

As the lymph vessels move fluid out of the tissues, waste products, bacteria, dead cells and large protein molecules are collected.

The waste products are carried to the lymph nodes to be broken down and eliminated, while the protein rich fluid is transported back to the heart to re-join circulation.



## What is Lymphoedema?

- When the lymph vessels are unable to transport lymph fluid back into circulation it accumulates, resulting in chronic swelling. If left untreated it may result in hardening skin tissue.
- This build-up of protein-rich lymph fluid is known as lymphedema. Once this condition occurs, the swelling may increase if an effective treatment program is not initiated.
- Secondary Lymphedema is a result of damage to the lymphatic system. Gynecological surgeries with/without radiation and/or removal of lymph nodes are the most common causes.
- Secondary lymphedema occurs most commonly in the arms but may also develop in the legs. Other causes may include a traumatic injury, infection, or severe chronic venous insufficiency.

## Frequently asked questions

### What do I do if I get a cut in the area?

- Wash with soap and water and apply an antiseptic cream/ointment.
- Watch out for signs of infection.

### What do I do if I think I have an infection?

**Check for signs of infection:** swelling, heat, rash, itching, redness, pain, fever, flu-like symptoms.

If you get an infection it is very important to contact your GP for an antibiotic or contact your liaison nurse **as soon as possible**.



**My Notes:**

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 4. Simple Lymphatic Drainage

Lymphatic massage or drainage is a technique to enhance the travel of fluid in the lymphatic system. It is very gentle and light as the lymphatic vessels are just below the skin. This method is intended to encourage the natural drainage of the lymph system which carries waste products away from the tissues back toward the heart. It is carried out in combination with breathing exercises.

Your physiotherapist will give you more detail on this as needed.



**Video on Simple lymphatic drainage:**

<http://www.medic.video/b-lymph>

- It is hard to predict who will and will not develop lymphoedema. Sometimes our bodies find ways to compensate for the missing nodes, and do not develop lymphoedema for months or years after treatment.
- Some people do not develop lymphoedema at all. As our bodies are unable to regenerate lymph nodes once they have been damaged by surgery or radiation there is a lifelong risk of developing lymphoedema.



- Wear loose, non-restrictive clothing.
- Move about the cabin frequently to help your muscles pump.
- Ensure adequate fluid intake.
- Maintain healthy eating, avoiding caffeine, alcohol and salty foods.
- Make sure you wear your garment as directed.

## Signs and symptoms

- The first obvious sign of lymphedema is swelling characterized by "pitting." This is recognizable when the skin is pressed for a few seconds and the indentation does not immediately disappear.

### **Other symptoms:**

- Discomfort or heaviness in affected area
- Changes in the texture of the skin
- Jewellery or clothing may feel tighter.
- Veins or tendons are harder to see, and/or the usual joint shapes look less pronounced.

## Air Travel


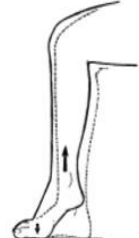

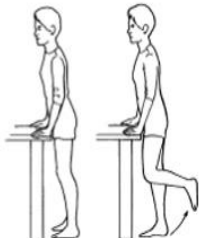

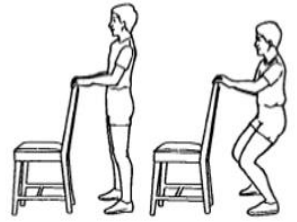
## 3. Garments

Wearing a compression garment provides external pressure to assist lymph drainage and prevent additional swelling. In use, you should wear your compression garment every day for as long as you are up and about. Take the garment off at bedtime; arm sleeves may be an exception to this rule depending on what your therapist advises.





## Exercises – Start as early as possible

	
<p>Roll your foot in a circle Repeat in the opposite direction</p>	<p>Place your foot flat on the floor Tap your heels</p>
	
<p>Stand holding on to a firm surface (e.g. table) Lift one foot off the floor as high as you can Slowly lower back down</p>	<p>Bend your knee, lifting your foot up behind you and lower</p>
	
<p>Sit with your feet down Straighten and bend your knee</p>	<p>Slowly bend both your knees and then slowly stand back up</p>

Complete 10 reps of each x 3 times per day as able

## Managing Lymphoedema

## 1. Skin care

Once your nodes have been damaged or removed, you have a lifelong risk of lymphoedema. To avoid lymphoedema developing or worsening you should **avoid cuts or infections**.

*Here are some tips:*

- Keep your skin well moisturised to avoid dry skin.
- Apply moisturizer daily after showering
- Avoid wearing restrictive clothing or jewellery.
- Do not have injections, blood samples or your blood pressure taken on the affected side.
- Be careful with pets to avoid getting scratched.
- Use gloves or long sleeves/trousers to avoid scratches when completing tasks e.g gardening.
- Wear oven gloves when taking items from the oven or lifting hot pot's to help prevent burns.
- Protect yourself from sunburn.
- If manicuring your nails, don't cut cuticles on the affected side. Keep the cuticles moisturised.
- In an area where you might expect insect bites, use insect repellent or cover up to reduce bites.
- Avoid very hot baths, saunas or extremes of hot or cold.

- As cuts increase the risk of infection, avoid using wet razors to remove unwanted hair. Use an electric razor or depilatory cream.
- If you have a cut/break to the skin keep the area clean, apply antiseptic cream and keep it covered. Watch for signs of infection (redness, warmth, pus). If the area goes red, mark the boundary with a pen to see if it is spreading. If you see signs of infection go to your GP for antibiotics.



## 2. Physical Activity

- Exercise has been shown to improve lymphoedema symptoms. It is recommended to complete 30 minutes of moderate exercise 5 days a week. Even a brief, slow walk can provide benefits.
- Gradually build up your duration and intensity of exercise. It is important to monitor your limb and see how it responds to exercise. Monitor for changes to size, shape,



texture, soreness, heaviness or fullness. Take frequent breaks during activity to allow for limb recovery.

- Swimming or exercise in water has been shown to be beneficial in managing lymphoedema.

**Exercise** is important in lymphoedema as moving muscles help to pump the fluid through your limb.

*If you have any questions about what type of exercise might work for you, just speak to your physiotherapist.*



**Weight Management:** Increased weight complicates lymphoedema. Maintain a balanced diet of fruit, vegetables, whole grains and protein. Avoid excessive consumption of fatty foods, sweets, salt and alcohol.

Ensure you have adequate water intake.

