

# Skin Care

A person with lymphedema is more prone to develop an infection in the affected limb or area due to a localised reduction in lymph fluid drainage capacity and, consequently, to impaired immune function. This is why meticulous skin care is important. The purpose of skin care is to reduce the risk of skin breakdown, fungal infections, or cellulitis/erysipelas. These problems can worsen lymphedema and make the edema harder to manage. Daily management and monitoring keeps the skin supple, soft, and more resilient.



## WHAT IS RECOMMENDED

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- Wash your skin daily (if possible) with warm water and, if the skin is very dry or fragile, use a soap-free cleanser.
- Carefully dry your skin, especially in between skin folds, toes and fingers, in order to avoid fungal infections or tissue maceration.
- Moisturise daily with a lotion or cream suitable to your skin type making sure it is completely absorbed before applying compression garments (especially when you have compression garments produced with natural rubber). Use a towel to wipe away any excess moisturiser. Consider moisturising at night-time.
- Protect your skin from the sun by wearing your compression garments and applying UV protection cream where skin is exposed.
- Protect your skin from bites, scratches, cuts, burns and abrasions. Wear your compression garments and take care around pets. For those with upper limb lymphedema, use garden gloves, oven mitts, and dishwashing gloves, as necessary. For those with lower limb lymphedema, use correctly fitted shoes and socks to avoid friction and blisters. Consider using protective shoes at the beach to avoid walking barefooted.
- To avoid burns, be careful when exposing your skin to high temperature surfaces or water (e.g. saunas, spas, or bath water).
- Use insect repellent when necessary.
- Pay attention with nail care, obtain a medical pedicure, or see a podiatrist for toenail problems.
- Check your skin daily for any changes such as breaks in the skin, leakage of lymph fluid, pressure points from compression garments or changes in colour.



## WHAT YOU SHOULD NOT DO

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- Do not ignore signs of infections such as redness, rash, warmth, or tenderness/pain. Seek medical attention immediately if there is a suspicion of infection.
- Do not ignore leakage of lymph fluid. Keep skin clean and dry while still applying your compression garments or bandages and seek medical attention if needed.



## Pediatric and Primary Lymphedema

- Do not ignore wounds on your affected limb. Clean and disinfect the wound. Seek professional advice in case of worsening or a slow healing process.
- Do not ignore pain, signs of pressure or friction from your garments, silicone band or bandages. It might mean that they should be refitted, or the bandage reapplied.
- Do not use a hair removal method on your affected limb that may upset the skin integrity or create skin breaks.