

Information About CDT Effectiveness for Lymphedema

Compression therapy also improves the function of the muscle pumps, helps to reduce fibrotic tissue, and promotes venous and lymphatic return.

In the first phase of CDT, compression therapy is achieved with the application of special short-stretch bandages. These bandage materials are used between MLD treatments and prevent the reaccumulation of lymph fluid, which has been moved out of the extremity during the MLD session. Once the extremity is decongested, the patient wears compression garments during the day. In some cases it may be necessary for the patient to additionally wear bandages at night. In order to achieve best results, specially trained personnel should take measurements for these elastic support garments; incorrectly fitted sleeves or stockings will have negative effects. The type of garments (round or flat-knit style) and the compression class depend on many factors such as the patient's age and the severity of the swelling. For upper extremity lymphedema, compression classes I (20-30 mmHg) or II (30-40 mmHg); for lymphedema of the lower extremities, compression classes II, III (40-50 mmHg) or IV (> 50 mmHg) are suitable. In some cases it may be necessary to apply compression class III to an upper extremity or an even greater compression than class IV to a lower extremity lymphedema. This can be achieved by wearing two stockings on top of each other, or by the application of bandages on top of a stocking.

To have the maximum effect, garments must be worn every day and replaced after 6 months.

Exercises: a customized exercise program is designed by the therapist for each patient. These decongestive exercises aid the effects of the joint and muscle pumps and should be performed by the patient wearing the compression bandage or garment. Vigorous movements or exercises causing pain must be avoided. Exercises should be performed slowly and with both the affected and nonaffected extremity.

Skin care: the skin in lymphedema is very susceptible to infections and usually dry. A low-pH lotion, free of alcohol and fragrances, should be used to maintain the moisture of the skin and to avoid infections. You should consult your physician if there are any fungal infections present in your affected extremity.

Do's and Don'ts

Your lymphedema therapist will explain to you in detail how to avoid infections and other conditions, which could lead to a worsening of your lymphedema. Listed below are just a few general guidelines:

- Avoid any injuries to the skin - be careful working in the garden, playing with your pets or doing housework. Avoid the use of scissors to cut your nails and don't cut your cuticles. Injuries, even small ones, may cause infections.
- Avoid mosquito bites -- wear insect repellents when outdoors. A single mosquito bite can cause an infection.
- Use caution when exercising -- avoid movements that overstrain; discuss proper exercises and activities with your therapist.
- Avoid heat -- very hot showers, hot packs on your extremity, sunbathing, and the use of saunas could have a negative effect on your lymphedema. Avoid extreme changes in temperature (hot/cold), massages ("Swedish") on your affected extremity or any cosmetics that irritate the skin.
- Inform all health care personnel that you have lymphedema - injections or acupuncture in your affected extremity should be avoided. Blood pressure should be taken on the extremity free of lymphedema.
- Nutrition is important -- there is no special diet for lymphedema. Today most nutritionists recommend a low-salt, low-fat diet. Obesity may have a negative effect on your swelling.
- Travel - avoid mosquito-infested areas; when traveling by airplane apply an additional bandage on top of your garment.
- Clothing - clothing that is too tight may restrict the proper flow of lymph. Avoid tight bras, panties or socks and make sure your jewelry fits loosely.
- See your doctor - if you have any signs of an infection (fever, chills, red and hot skin), fungal infections or if you notice any other unusual changes that may be related to your lymphedema.
- General tips -- always wear your compression garments during the day and if necessary your bandages at night; elevate your extremity as often as possible during the daytime; perform your exercises daily and always consult your doctor or therapist should you have any questions about your lymphedema.