



Love your skin this summer

We all know the perils of summer for our skin; sunburn, insect bites and gardening scratches and scrapes. For people with lymphovenous conditions, however, these issues can result in infection. Here we explain how to take care of your skin during the summer months.

Wear sunscreen

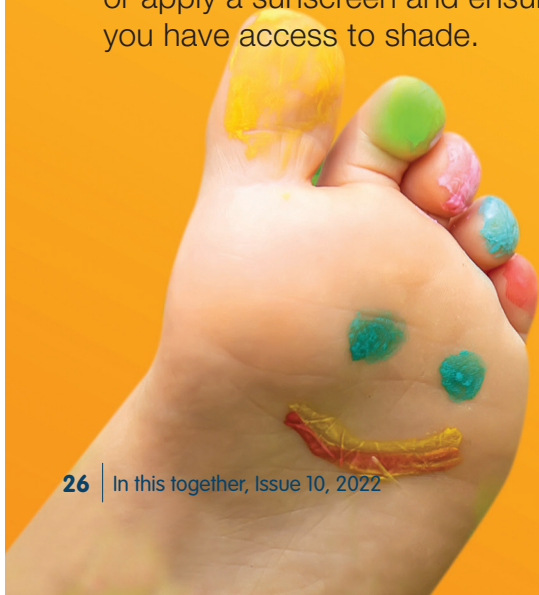
When in the sun, it is important to protect your skin from damage. Sunburn can result in cracked and sore areas of skin that can be an entry for bacteria, which, if you are vulnerable, can result in infection. Avoid sunburn by covering up with a suitable lightweight fabric, or apply a sunscreen and ensure you have access to shade.

Protect your skin when gardening

If you have lymphoedema or fragile skin on your arms, when gardening, make sure you wear protective gloves. Gauntlet gloves are ideal as they offer protection of the lower arms too, while heavy duty gloves can avoid skin damage from thorns and brambles. Similarly if you have vulnerable skin on your legs, protect your skin by wearing trousers and shoes that offer protection from possible bites, cuts and scratches.

When washing

Avoid using perfumed products that strip your skin of its natural protective barrier. Always moisturise afterwards, also using





a bland moisturiser. All products should ideally have a skin neutral pH to avoid stripping the skin of moisture and making it prone to dryness and cracking, which in turn may increase the risk of infection. See p. 28–29 for more information on skin care.



Insect repellent

Try to avoid being bitten by insects by using a repellent that won't dry out your skin. If possible, use a product that contains natural ingredients instead of harsh chemicals. Avoiding alcohol-based brands is advised (indicated by ingredients that end in 'ol') as this can strip the skin leaving it vulnerable to damage.



Insect bites

As soon as a bite appears, treat with a topical cream for insect bites. An anti-histamine tablet may help to reduce itching and inflammation in the area. Although it is difficult, try to avoid scratching the bite, especially if your skin is fragile. If the temptation is too much, cut your nails short and keep them clean to avoid skin damage and to reduce the risk of infection.



Inspect your skin

Following an activity such as gardening, where you might have got scratched and bitten without noticing, it is important to inspect the skin for signs of damage, that could act as an entry point for bacteria in the environment. If you notice any damaged areas, wash it and apply an antiseptic cream. If the wound is significant, apply a dressing until healing takes place. Monitor any damage regularly to check for signs of infection (described below).



When to seek help

People with conditions of the limb, such as lymphoedema of the arm or leg, chronic oedema or venous leg ulceration, are at an increased risk of developing skin infection known as cellulitis. Once you have had an episode of cellulitis, you are at risk of further infections. Keep an eye on your skin and look for signs of swelling, spreading redness, heat and pain, beyond what is normal for you. If in any doubt, contact your GP or if your symptoms are severe, visit A&E. ▶