

Are you using the right compression garment?

If you are a compression user, it is important to ensure the garment you use is the best one to manage your condition, as not all compression is the same. Here we explain the differences, and how to identify if your garment is right for you.



Compression garments are made from elasticated fabric designed to improve circulation and apply pressure. But which type is best for which lower limb condition?

Circular or flat knit hosiery?

There are two types of compression garments, circular-knit which are

produced as a tube without a seam, and flat-knit which are made as a piece of fabric that is stitched together, producing a seam.

Circular knit

Circular knit hosiery is elastic and contains swelling or oedema in the same way as a balloon holding water. As swelling in the



limb puts pressure on the elastic of the garment, it will gently stretch like a balloon to accommodate the fluid. This means if a circular knit garment is worn to contain severe swelling, the garment may not effectively contain the swelling,

meaning the limb will become more swollen and the garment may become too small.

This can be seen by a garment that begins to roll or dig in as swelling increases.

The resulting roll of fabric can exert extra pressure on the area of skin and cause it to break down. For this reason, circular knit garments are usually used when swelling is mild or absent. The elasticity of circular knit garments can also make them difficult to put on and remove, so may not be suitable for people with limited dexterity. However, as they have thinner fabric, they are often more acceptable to the wearer.

Flat knit

Flat knit hosiery is more rigid. Like a paper cup it holds its shape when containing fluid, and it is therefore more effective at containing swelling. The rigidity of the fabric also makes it less likely to roll and cut off the circulation of the limb. Sometimes made-to-measure garments (rather than off the shelf) are required in lower limb management. This means that the garments are specifically made for individuals and should be a perfect fit and comfortable.



Lymphoedema

Lymphoedema is a long-term (chronic) condition that causes swelling in the body's tissues. It can affect any part of the body, but usually develops in the arms or legs (NHS UK, 2023). Lymphoedema is caused by a problem with the lymphatic system, a network of vessels and glands spread throughout the body.

Compression therapy helps to stimulate more effective lymph drainage. The combination of exercise and compression encourages the fluid to move out of the affected limb (Patient, 2023).

For the treatment of lymphoedema, flat-knit garments are recommended, due to their ability to resist swelling in the limb and to return fluid to the circulation.

Lipodema

Lipoedema is an abnormal build-up of fat cells, and it is almost exclusively a female condition (Lipoedema UK, 2024). The name lip-'oedema' is a little misleading. Unlike lymphoedema, which is characterised by swelling, it is not caused by abnormal drainage in the lymphatic system, rather it is the result of abnormal fat accumulation. The condition often runs in families and tends to develop when hormone levels are fluctuating (e.g. puberty, pregnancy, menopause). Lipoedema most commonly affects the whole of both legs and less often arms. Heaviness, discomfort and pain in the affected areas are common symptoms.

Compression garments will not change the size or shape of the areas affected

by lipoedema. However, wearing a compression garment can:

- Help reduce discomfort and heaviness, and in turn improve mobility
- Support tissues and joints, providing a more even shape/silhouette over the limbs
- Reduce swelling in cases where there is fluid retention or secondary lymphoedema present (Lipoedema UK, 2024).

In the early stages of lipoedema, circular-knit garments may be suitable, whereas in the later stages flat-knit garments are recommended. If skin folds or 'ankle cuffing' is present it is best to wear a made-to-measure, flat-knit garment to bridge the folds and prevent digging in.

Venous leg ulcers

Compression therapy improves the return of your venous blood supply by applying supporting pressure to the leg and foot. Compression therapy is very effective at reducing swelling, improving blood flow in the veins and healing or preventing ulcers (Ritchie and Warwick, 2018). It has been shown that compression therapy can reduce inflammation around the wound; it can have a direct impact on reducing pain, swelling, skin changes and helps the calf and foot muscles to work more effectively (Ritchie and Warwick, 2018). Using compression with ankle and calf exercises is important and will make the compression therapy more effective. For the treatment and prevention of

venous leg ulcers with oedema, flat-knit garments are recommended. For the treatment and prevention of venous leg ulcers without swelling, circular-knit garments can be used.

If your garment digs in or rolls, is failing to contain your swelling, or if your swelling is appearing above or below your garment, this could be a sign your garment is not right for your condition.

If you are unsure, it may be worth speaking to your healthcare professional and explaining the problems you are experiencing with your garment. You could also ask for a referral to a specialist clinic for a thorough assessment, diagnosis and to be measured and fitted with the perfect garment for you. As your general and limb health changes, so too will your compression therapy needs, so remember to seek advice if it has been a while since you have seen a clinician or if you have any concerns. ▶

Lipoedema UK (2024) What is lipoedema. Available online: <https://lipoedema.co.uk/about-lipoedema/>

NHS UK (2023) Lymphoedema. Available online: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/lymphoedema/>

Patient (2023) Lymphoedema and lipoedema. Available online: <https://patient.info/signs-symptoms/oedema-swelling/lymphoedema-and-lipoedema>

Ritchie G, Warwick G (2018) Understanding how compression works: part 1. J Community Nurs 32(2): 24-32

Wound Care People (2019) Best practice in the community. Chronic oedema. Wound Care People, Wixford. Available online: www.jcn.co.uk; www.gpnursing.com

JOBST® ELVAREX®



Meet Didi

Didi is an athlete and had always dreamed of becoming a model ever since she was a child. But when lymphoedema developed in her left leg at the age of 12, she felt like it could be an obstacle in pursuing her dreams. However, Didi refused to let it hold her down and pushed herself to achieve more than she thought possible. Read her story below.*

Didi Won't Let Lymphoedema Hold Her Down

It took doctors a while to make the right diagnosis. When Didi finally learned that she had been living with lymphoedema, she thought she would have to give up on her modeling dreams. But her determination to succeed overcame her self-doubt. Today, she is a successful athlete, a professional model and a vocal advocate for lymphoedema awareness, particularly amongst young people. *"If other people know that there's a young person out there showing that they can live their life and not let their condition stop them, then they will do the same and then they can achieve whatever goals or dreams they want to have."*

Didi is wearing **JOBST Elvarex Soft**

For more information on JOBST Elvarex, please visit our website: www.jobst.co.uk

*This is a personal report of the patient and does not necessarily reflect the knowledge of JOBST or the current state of science. Always seek advice from a Healthcare Professional if you experience any symptoms.