



Why it's important to take care of your skin

Looking after your skin is an important part of your lymphoedema management. Here we explain how by remembering WEL - Washing, using Emollients and Looking out for problems.

Your skin plays a vital role in protecting your body, so keeping it healthy is essential. When your skin is well cared for—clean, moisturised, and intact—it's better able to do its job and protect you from infection.

Read on to see what you can do to keep your skin in tip-top condition.

Your daily skin routine: remember 'WEL'

Keeping your skin healthy doesn't have to be complicated. Just remember WEL (Wash, Emollient application and Look) – this is a simple way to remember what you need to do, stay on top of your daily skin care:

W – Wash

Regular cleaning helps to keep your skin healthy by removing dead skin cells, any build up of skin care products such as moisturiser, emollient or medicated creams, and harmful bacteria from the environment. Ideally, you should wash your skin every day, but if that's not possible, aim for at least three times a week.

What you use to wash your skin is important. You can use warm tap water and a soft, clean flannel. Avoid heavily perfumed soaps, as they can dry out or irritate your skin. Instead, use a pH-balanced soap or a soap substitute. Some moisturisers can even be used as cleansers.

After washing, be gentle when drying. Your skin may be delicate, so pat it dry with a soft towel rather than rubbing. Make sure to dry thoroughly between your toes and also any skin folds, as these areas are more prone to build-up of moisture and bacteria.

E – Emollients

Emollients, also known as moisturisers, help to trap moisture in the skin, keeping it soft, supple, and less likely to crack or become damaged. This is especially important when you have lymphoedema or chronic oedema, as your skin is more vulnerable to damage.

Emollients come in different forms, such as creams and ointments:

- Creams are lighter, absorb more quickly, and are less greasy. However, they may contain more preservatives, which can irritate sensitive skin
- Ointments are thicker and excellent for very dry or thickened skin. They don't absorb as quickly and can feel greasier, but they usually contain fewer preservatives, making them gentler for sensitive skin.

Safety warning when using emollients

Many emollients, especially ointments, contain paraffin, which is highly flammable. To stay safe, you should:



- Avoid open flames or sources of heat, such as candles, gas hobs, or heaters
- Do not smoke while using or wearing clothing that has been in contact with paraffin-based products.

Even when the product has soaked into your skin or clothing, the fire risk can still remain. Always follow safety advice and speak to your healthcare professional if you have any concerns.

Tips for applying emollients

- Apply once or twice a day, especially after washing your skin
- Use unperfumed products to avoid irritation. Speak to your GP or healthcare professional if you're unsure which moisturiser is best for your skin
- Apply in the direction of hair growth (usually downward) to reduce the risk of irritation or blocked hair follicles
- Apply in the evening, after removing your compression

garment, so the moisturiser has time to soak in overnight

- Keep the product clean by avoiding dipping your fingers into tubs. Use a pump dispenser or spatula if possible, and always replace the lid after use.

L – Looking out from problems

Spotting skin changes early is important—it allows for quick treatment and helps prevent more serious problems, like cellulitis.

Make it part of your daily routine to check your skin for any of the following signs:

- Redness or warmth
- Pain or tenderness
- Dryness or cracks
- Areas of hardening
- Increased swelling.

Also look out for signs of infection, such as:

- High temperature (fever)
- Feeling cold and shivery
- Feeling generally unwell

If you notice any of these symptoms, contact your GP immediately, as early treatment can stop things from getting worse.

Don't forget to check between your toes and in any skin folds, as these areas are more prone to fungal infections and can be easily missed!

If you are worried or something doesn't seem quite right always discuss it with your healthcare professional – you know what 'normal' is for you and when something is unusual. ➡