

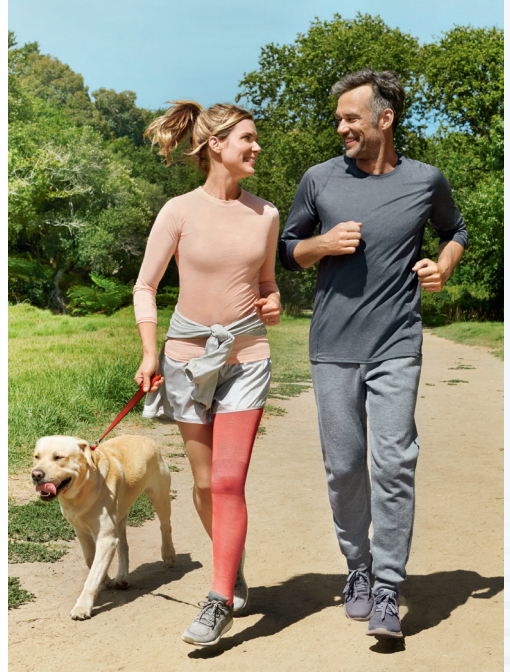
Let's get physical

We all know that exercise is good for us. It can help to improve strength, heart function and mental health. Exercise can also have a positive effect on lymphoedema too. It enhances the movement of fluid from the tissues and helps to move it back into the circulation¹, to reduce swelling.

Exercise and movement can also help you to keep your weight stable, which is important because weight gain can make lymphoedema worse. Choose the exercise that you prefer – the most important thing is to use the limb as normally as possible. Speak to your healthcare professional to check that your exercise programme is suitable before you start.

To help you get the most from an exercise and movement programme, think about the following:

- Use the limb as normally as possible
- Position and support the limb
- Always wear your compression garment (unless swimming; although some people wear old compression garments while they swim to give their limb more support)
- Build up to the exercise programme slowly and start with gentle exercise
- Do some breathing exercises before and after exercise, as well as warming up and cooling down, to avoid injury



- Avoid hard or repetitive movements as this may increase swelling
- Swimming is really good for you, but avoid hot tubs, saunas, steam rooms or jacuzzis as the extra heat may increase swelling
- Stop if your limb feels tired or uncomfortable
- Gentle forms of exercise that encourage movement, stretching and breathing are good for you. They help to increase lymph flow
- Rest and elevating your legs at night are also important to help reduce swelling.

1. Lymphoedema Framework (2006) Best Practice for the Management of Lymphoedema. International consensus. MEP Ltd, London.

Here are some exercises. You may choose to do all or some of them to make up a routine that you are comfortable with. By exercising two or three times a week, you will soon begin to feel the benefits both physically and mentally. Remember to always warm up and cool down to get the best from your activity and to avoid injury.

WARM-UP

These are suggested warm-up exercises, but work within your own limits and ask your healthcare professional if you are not sure about any of them.



Sit on a chair.
Raise your left leg slowly off the ground and then place back down.

Repeat this for your right leg.
Repeat 5 times for each leg.



Stand with your legs wide apart. With your body upright, bend your left knee, placing your weight on this leg until your right leg is stretched.

Repeat for your right leg.
Repeat 5 times for each leg.



Stand with your legs shoulder-width apart.
Bend into a half squat position with your arms stretched out behind you.

Come back up to a standing position, sweeping your arms up above your head.

The white area shows the final position.

Repeat 10 times.

EXERCISES

These are suggested exercises, but work within your own limits and ask your healthcare professional if you are not sure about any of them.



Stand up with your legs shoulder-width apart. Lift your left leg to waist height, touch your knee with your left hand and then lower your leg to the ground.

Repeat this with your right leg and right hand. Keep your upper body straight while doing this exercise.
Repeat 5 times.



Lying on your back, lift your legs one at a time then make round 'cycling' movements in the air. Repeat 5 cycles and then rest.

Repeat 5 times.

You may find it useful to put a pillow on the floor to rest your legs as you lower them to the ground.

Download this exercise sheet online at:
<https://compression.inthis-together.co.uk/journals/issue/11/issue16>

3



Kneel on the floor. Move your arms down to the floor so that you are on all fours with your hands stretched in front of you.

Lift your left leg up and out behind you, straightening your leg as you lift it. Your leg should be in a horizontal line with your body but no higher than your hips, as shown in the picture.

Keep your back straight. Bring your leg back down so you are on all fours again.

Repeat this with your right leg.

Repeat 5 times.

4



Lie on your back.

Bend your left hip and knee towards your chest, keeping your arms on the floor.

Make sure that your back, head and right leg stay on the ground.

Relax your left leg down to the floor again.

Repeat for your right leg.

Repeat 5 times.

5



Lie on your back, with both knees bent and your hands on each thigh.

Slowly push your hands up your thighs towards your knees, lifting your head and shoulders off the ground.

Only lift off the ground as far as feels comfortable and do not pull on your neck.

Move your hands back down your legs, and bring your head and shoulders back onto the floor.

Repeat 10 times.

6



Lie on your back with your knees bent.

Lift your buttocks up until your thighs and back form a straight line.

Hold this for 5 seconds, keeping your feet flat on the floor.

Bring your buttocks back down to the floor.

Repeat 10 times.

7



Sit up straight on the floor then lean back slightly, supporting your weight with your hands and straighten your legs as much as you can.

Bend your left ankle up towards you so that your toes are pointing to the ceiling. Then bend your ankle down, pointing the toes to the floor.

Relax and repeat for your right leg.

Repeat 5 times.

8



Lie on your front with your forehead resting on your arms.

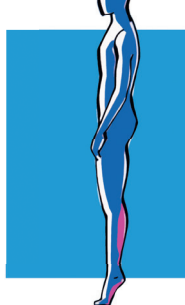
Raise your left leg, bringing your heel towards your buttocks while keeping your thigh on the ground.

Lower your leg back down to the floor.

Repeat for your right leg.

Repeat 5 times.

9



Stand with your feet together holding on to a firm surface like a chair for support.

Raise your heels off the floor.

Bring your heels back down to the floor.

Repeat 10 times.

10



Lie on your right side, with your head either supported by, or lying on, your right arm.

Put your left hand on the floor in front of you for support.

Slowly raise your left leg so that your legs form a 'V' shape and then lower it back down. Your body should remain in a straight line.

Repeat 5 times.

Then switch position so you are lying on your left side, and repeat 5 times on this side.

COOL DOWN

Finish any exercise programme by cooling down. Here are some suggested cool down exercises, but work within your own limits and check with your healthcare professional if you are not sure if the exercises are suitable for you.



1

Stand by a wall. Stand up straight with your legs slightly apart and lift your arms above your head. Lean forwards slightly, putting your hands on the wall.

Step your left leg back, and put your heel on the ground. Your right leg should be bent.

Slowly push your hips forward until you feel a stretch in your left calf. Hold in this position for 15 seconds or less if this is uncomfortable.

Repeat for your other leg.



2

Stand up straight by a wall with your legs slightly apart.

Put your left hand on the wall or a firm surface for support.

Bend your right leg, grasping your foot with your right hand. Pull your heel gently towards your buttocks.

Keep your body straight and keep both knees together.

Hold in this position for 15 seconds or less if this is uncomfortable.

Repeat for your other leg.



3

Stand with your legs slightly apart. Bend forward and push your left leg forward with your toes pointed up and your heel on the ground.

Your right leg should be bent.

Place your hand on your thigh for support.

Hold this position for about 15 seconds or less if this is uncomfortable.

Repeat for your other leg.



4

Sit on the floor. Support yourself by putting your hands on the floor at the side of your hips.

Bend your knees, put the soles of your feet together and very gently push your knees towards the ground.

Hold this position for 15 seconds or less if this is uncomfortable.

Repeat 10 times.

Remember regular movement and exercise have many benefits—not just for swelling, but for your overall health. They can:

- Boost lymphatic drainage and help move fluid out of the tissues
- Support healthy blood circulation
- Help with weight loss or maintaining a healthy weight
- Improve mood, energy levels, and general wellbeing
- Support heart health.