



Caring for your wound at home

When you have lymphoedema your skin is more vulnerable to break down and infection. Here we explain how to monitor for, and treat, any wound you may have to help you heal more quickly.



Lymphoedema makes you prone to skin damage which can develop into a wound or a leg ulcer. Cuts, bites and scratches also need to be treated promptly to avoid infection.

All wounds are different, and need a thorough assessment by a healthcare professional. They will help to identify the cause of your wound and how to treat it. This may be with a dressing and compression (if you don't use it already).

Compression therapy is the key

Compression therapy helps to correct the underlying condition so that the wound can heal. However, without continued use, the underlying cause will remain and the wound is likely to come back.

Do I need a dressing?

A wound dressing helps to form a protective cover from bacteria and prevents infection from developing while the wound is healing. It can also manage symptoms like wound fluid (exudate) or pain.

The type of dressing that you use may need to change over time as your wound gets better or worse. For example, if your wounds is leaking less than it was, you won't need a thick dressing to absorb the fluid any more. Regular reassessments by your healthcare professional are therefore essential to ensure your treatment is always right for the healing stage you are at.

Despite what some people might believe, leaving wounds open to the air can actually slow healing down as this makes the wound dry out. Using the right dressing, as advised by your clinician, keeps your wound moist, warm, and clean — which is ideal for healing.

It also protects the wound, can make it less painful as your nerves are not exposed to the air and means it is less likely to become infected.

Who will change your dressing?

You may be offered the options below:

- Have your dressing changed by your healthcare professional
- Change your dressing yourself (or with help from a carer)
- A combination of both, with dressings supplied for you to change between appointments.

All of these are valid options. Many people prefer doing it themselves as it fits better into their daily routine, and gives them the freedom to wash their limb and change their dressing when it is dirty, without needing to wait for an appointment or nurse visit.



Thinking about changing your own dressing?

If you plan to care for your wound at home, here are some important points:

You should be given a written care plan

Your healthcare professional will give you written instructions (a care plan) with clear, step-by-step instructions on caring for your wound.

You need to feel confident

Before starting, your healthcare professional should take the time to discuss any questions or concerns you have with you, so you feel confident and able to manage and also aware of when to seek help. Your healthcare professional should:

- Discuss the treatment options with you
- Show you how to safely apply and change the dressing
- Make sure you're happy and comfortable with the process



- Check that you know how and when to contact your healthcare professional, if there is a chance in your wound or how you feel.

Do I need to change my dressing every day?

Not necessarily. Some dressings can stay on for up to 7 days, depending on how much fluid your wound is producing or if there are signs of infection. It really depends on your individual wound and dressing that is being used. Your healthcare professional will guide you on how often to change it and write this in your care plan.

All change! How to change your dressing safely at home

Follow these simple steps to reduce the risk of infection:

- Prepare a clean area – gather everything you need: dressing pack, gloves, cleansing solution (see box 1), a new dressing, moisturiser, and a rubbish bag
- Wash your hands with warm soapy water and dry with a clean towel – this makes sure that your hands are clean and that you don't introduce germs into the wound
- Remove your old dressing carefully and without touching the wound itself
- Put the old dressing in the rubbish bag
- Wash your hands again to remove any bacteria present on the old dressing from your hands
- Gently clean your wound using a piece of gauze or debridement pad or cloth if recommended, moving from the centre of the wound outwards. Your healthcare professional will advise you on an appropriate cleaning solution
- Clean the skin surrounding the wound moving from the wound outwards
- Apply your moisturiser to the surrounding skin
- Wearing gloves, open the new dressing and apply it to the wound
- Reapply your compression therapy
- Dispose of rubbish safely as advised by your healthcare professional
- Wash your hands again to make sure that you don't transfer any germs from your wound into your environment.

Is my wound getting better?

Keeping a wound diary is a great idea. In this, you can record:

- How much fluid is coming from the wound
- Whether the wound is getting smaller
- Any pain you're experiencing, when it occurs, and what helps to relieve it
- Any changes in the skin around the wound.



You can also take a picture on your mobile phone, if you have one, whenever you change your dressing. This helps you and your healthcare professional to track your progress and can reassure you that your wound is improving with time.

Ask your healthcare professional for guidance on how long on average it should take for your wound to heal, so you can monitor it.

Box 1. Keep it clean

There are a few different ways of cleaning a wound. Your healthcare professional will advise on which you should use:

- Water
- Saline
- Emollient
- Antimicrobial cleansing solution

When do I need to get in touch with my healthcare professional?

If you are worried about your wound, contact your healthcare professional as soon as possible. A common concern is a wound infection. Things to look out for which may mean you have an infection are:

- A sudden increase in the amount of fluid which leaks from your wound and is no longer being controlled by the dressing
- New or worsening pain in the wound
- Bleeding in the wound
- Redness or heat of the surrounding skin
- Offensive smell
- Feeling generally unwell (e.g. fever, chills, fatigue).

Your healthcare professional is there to support you. Don't hesitate to reach out if you have concerns or questions. ➤