



Types of compression therapy: which is right for you?

There are different ways of delivering compression therapy, depending your individual condition and needs. Here, we explain what options are available to you.



Compression therapy is the gold standard of treatment for lymphoedema and can be delivered in a variety of ways, commonly using bandages, wraps and garments. The best choice for you will be decided in partnership with your healthcare professional based on your treatment phase, your overall health, and the condition of your limb. Your ability to apply and remove your compression will also be considered, and any preferences

you may have regarding colour or style. Your healthcare professional will select the one that is best for you at that particular time and make sure you can apply it correctly so that it works properly.

Compression bandaging

When you're in the intensive stage of treatment and have significant swelling, therapy aims to reduce the swelling as much and as quickly as possible until it



stabilises. During this phase, compression bandaging is usually most suitable. It is able to adjust to changes in limb size as fluid is moved from the tissues into the circulation and swelling is reduced. Compression bandaging is also most appropriate if you have excessive fluid leakage, a large leg ulcer or an irregular shaped limb. In these cases, temporary padding may be used to reshape the limb to a usual cylindrical shape so that your compression works properly.

The downside is that bandaging is usually applied by a healthcare professional and as your swelling reduces you may need to see your healthcare professional more often for reapplication. Sometimes the bandages can feel hot and bulky and restrict movement, but they are usually used in the short term until wound size and fluid leakage has decreased. When this has happened, other methods of compression can be used.

Compression wraps

Compression wraps are special garments that wrap around your limb and are secured with Velcro. These must be fitted by your healthcare professional to make sure that they fit properly. Some brands have helpful markers or indicators to show exactly where to fasten them, so you get the right amount of compression.

They can be used during both the intensive and maintenance phases of treatment. In the intensive phase, they can be a great substitute for bandaging, allowing more independence for care. Because they are easy to put on and



take off, they're a good choice if you have difficulty with hand movement or want to manage your treatment yourself. Some brands allow for the garment to be cut to fit your limb (by your healthcare professional) as swelling reduces.

If you also have swelling in your foot, your healthcare professional may recommend a Velcro-fastening foot garment as well.

Compression hosiery

Once swelling has been reduced and is stable your healthcare professional may recommend that you wear compression hosiery to prevent deterioration or recurrence of your swelling. This comes in many styles and the best choice for you will depend on your individual needs, amount and volume of swelling and the shape and size of your limb. They can differ in how stretchy the fabric is, how much pressure they provide (dose), colour, size, length and style, e.g. whether they are open toe or closed toe.

Flat knit or circular knit hosiery garments are available. These terms describe how the fabric is made. The right type for you will depend on the shape of your leg and how much swelling you have. Usually,



flat-knit garments are recommended for people with lymphoedema.

Flat knit hosiery

Flat knit hosiery is made from fabric that's knitted in a flat sheet, then sewn together. It feels quite thick and firm – a bit like a paper cup which is rigid and holds its shape to contain fluid. Flat knit hosiery works best if you have lymphoedema or irregular skin folds, because it controls swelling more effectively and is less likely to roll down or dig in. Flat knit garments can be bought off the shelf or made to measure if necessary, to make sure they work properly.

Made to measure hosiery

- Made specifically to fit you
- Suits people who don't fit standard sizes, ie those with longer or shorter limbs, or with larger or irregular shaped limbs
- Correct fit makes them more comfortable and ensures that they work properly
- Supply will take longer as it is made on demand

Off the shelf hosiery

- Pre-made garments so no delay in supply
- Handful of different sizes

Whichever type you use, getting the measurements right for the brand you are buying/being prescribed and following the manufacturer's instructions is key to making sure it fits well and is comfortable to wear in the long run.

Some compression garments have special features to make them more comfortable to wear. These can include a softer top band at the top of the stocking to stop them digging into the skin, breathable fabrics to use at night, and special fabrics to make them fit better over tricky areas like knees or heels.

Circular knit hosiery

Circular knit hosiery is knitted in a continuous tube with no seam. This means that it is very stretchy – like a balloon holding water, the more fluid that is put into it the more it will expand – so it does not control severe swelling very well and may dig into the skin or roll down. Circular knit hosiery is often used for people with venous problems or a small amount of swelling.

Trouble putting or taking off your hosiery?

If you're finding it tricky to put on or take off your hosiery, you're not alone—many people do. There are helpful tools, called hosiery applicators, that can make the process much easier. Your healthcare professional can help you choose one that suits you. The easier it is to put your hosiery on, the more comfortable it will be for you to wear it every day and get the full benefit.

If you still have difficulty applying your hosiery after checking that the fit is correct and after trying an applicator, it may be worth discussing with your healthcare professional whether you could use a wrap. These use Velcro fasteners, so can be easier to put on.

