



Managing the emotional impact of a long-term condition

Living with a long-term condition like lymphoedema or venous disease can not only affect you physically – it can take its toll on your mental wellbeing too. Here we share some tips that you can use to improve your mental wellness.



Living with a long-term health condition like venous disease or lymphoedema can affect your emotional wellbeing in different ways. This might include: low mood, changes in your role and identity, worrying about your condition, and self/body image concerns are often mentioned. If you have one or more of these concerns, they can begin to

affect your social life, relationships and confidence.

Your physical and emotional wellbeing is interlinked – if you are upset or worried about your health, it could make it harder for you to engage in looking after yourself and so can have a negative impact on the outcomes of your treatment, as well as your everyday life.

However, if you can work out which aspects of your condition affect your emotional wellbeing, e.g. pain, you can then look at steps you can take to address these. It is important to set yourself realistic goals, as the positive feeling you get from achieving these will help encourage you to continue to look after your emotional and physical health.

Five steps to wellbeing

The *Five Steps To Wellbeing*¹ is recommended by the NHS as a way to make positive change. It highlights five key areas and recommends picking one small thing in each that you feel that you can manage, so that you can actively start to improve your wellbeing.

The five categories are:

1. Connect
2. Be active
3. Take notice
4. Keep learning
5. Give.

Here are some examples of things you could do in each of these areas to help you improve your emotional wellbeing.

1. Connect with other people

Good relationships help you build a sense of belonging and self-worth, enable you to share positive experiences, provide emotional support and allow you to support others. You could:

- Take time each day to be with your family, maybe by having a meal together



- Arrange a day out with friends
- Volunteer at a local school, hospital or community group.

2. Be physically active

Being active is great for your physical health and fitness, but also your mental wellbeing. It can raise your self-esteem, help you set and achieve goals or challenges, and cause chemical changes in your brain which can improve your mood.

This doesn't mean spending hours in the gym – you could do some gardening, go for a walk, do some strength and flexibility exercises, or put on some music and have a dance at home!

3. Take notice

Paying attention to the world around you, including your thoughts and feelings and your body, can improve your mental wellbeing. This



is sometimes called awareness or mindfulness. An important part of mindfulness is reconnecting with the sensations we experience, paying attention to the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of the present moment. That might be something as simple as the feel as you brush your hair, the sound of the birds or the smell of a flower outside.

Keep learning

Learning new skills can improve your mental wellbeing by boosting your self-confidence and raising self-esteem, helping you to build a sense of purpose and connect with others. You could learn to cook something new, sign up for a course at a local college, or try new hobbies such as learning a new sport, a language or how to paint.

Give

Acts of kindness can create positive feelings and a sense of reward, give you a feeling of purpose and help you connect with other people. These do not need to be grand gestures – you could:

- Say thank you to someone for something they have done for you
- Spend time with friends or relatives who need support or company
- Help at a school or care home.

Whatever you choose, take small steps towards things that matter to you and set yourself realistic goals – none of us are superhuman! ➡

1. NHS (2022) 5 steps to mental wellbeing. <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing/>



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Talking about your mental health

It can be hard to discuss how you are feeling emotionally at the best of times, and if you are unwell it can be harder still. If you are affected by low mood, anxiety or other mental health issues, talking to your healthcare professional about how you are feeling can be the first step in getting you some help and making you feel better.

Here are some things to think about:

- Be honest and open with the person you are talking to, whether it's someone you know and see regularly, or someone you don't see often
- Talk about how you feel, not what your medical condition is. Does it make you sad, frustrated, lonely, anxious, cross?
- Explain how you have been feeling over the last few weeks or months, and anything that has changed during that time – whether it's to you or someone close to you
- Use words and descriptions that feel natural to you – you don't need to use medical terms
- Do not think that your problem is unimportant or too small – everyone deserves help when they are unwell.

Be prepared

If you are worried about what you are going to say to your GP or other healthcare professional, it can be easy to forget things. By preparing before the appointment, you can make sure you cover everything that is important to you:



- Write down what you want to say in advance, and take the notes with you
- Tell the doctor or other healthcare professional if you are feeling nervous
- Take someone with you, like a family member or close friend
- If you have spoken to family or friends about this, practice what you are going to say with them
- Highlight or print out anything you have found that helps to explain how you are feeling
- Think about what you want to get from the appointment – is it a referral for therapy, more support at home, or something else. ➡

Adapted from Mind (2025) Seeking help for a mental health problem. <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/seeking-help-for-a-mental-health-problem/talking-to-your-gp/>



Meet Claire

Claire has had lymphoedema since birth. At the time, no doctor had a clue what caused the swelling in her legs and she was misdiagnosed with a club foot. Now, as a 49-year-old mother and successful business owner, she talks about how she stood up to her condition and learned how to keep on fighting. Read her story below.*

Claire Won't Let Lymphoedema Hold Her Down

Claire has been living with primary lymphoedema since childhood, and her condition worsened after the birth of her first daughter. Despite not receiving the right diagnosis at first and undergoing unsuccessful liposuction, she refused to let the isolation get the best of her. Today, she manages her condition with compression garments and wants to raise awareness about lymphoedema. At a medical conference, she even used water bottles to demonstrate the extra weight she carries on a daily basis, hoping to raise interest and inspire others in the community. *"I want to get other people to feel like they don't have to hide. It's nothing that is shameful. Not at all."*

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