

# The superpower of compression therapy

Compression therapy really does have superpowers when it comes to managing your lymphoedema. It is proven to reduce swelling, improve skin health and promote wound healing. Want to know how? Find out more below!



**Y**ou may not fully appreciate the importance of wearing a compression garment, so it might help to understand more about how it works to improve your condition. Compression is a superhero when it comes to managing conditions like lymphoedema, chronic swelling (oedema), and venous leg ulcers, and has multiple benefits.

## How does compression therapy work?

Compression therapy works by encasing and gently squeezing your affected limb(s). It provides resistance to the muscles and helps them to squeeze fluid out of the swollen areas and back into your body's circulation, where it can be cleared away naturally to reduce swelling.

Compression therapy also helps to support damaged and struggling veins and lymph vessels to prevent blood and lymph from pooling, and effectively move them from your limbs back to your heart.

Wearing compression regularly is key in the intensive, maintenance and preventative phases of treatment (see p.9). It not only helps reduce swelling, but it also prevents the fluid from building up again, keeping your limb more comfortable and healthier in the long run.

By clearing out lymph fluid from the tissues and preventing the pooling of blood in the veins, symptoms may get better. Swelling is reduced, skin condition is improved and wound healing (if a wound is present) is promoted.

### **Making compression fit into your life**

Reducing the volume of the affected limb can also help mobility, which in turn can help keep the swelling down, especially if wearing compression. Of course, to get these benefits, you

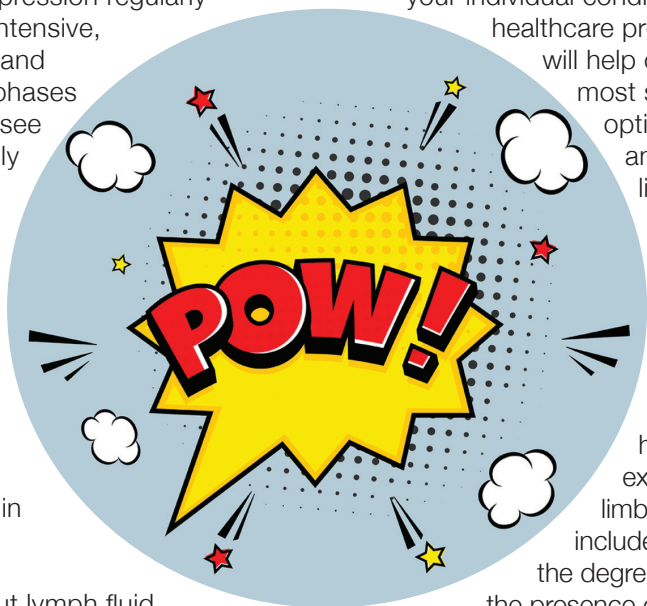
need to wear your compression every day, or as often as possible.

To do this it is key you have a garment that is acceptable to you, from a cosmetic and comfort point of view, and that is appropriate for your individual condition. Your healthcare professional will help choose the most suitable option for you and your limb(s), based on a full assessment.

This will include looking into your medical history, and examining your limb. This should include limb length, the degree of swelling, the presence of any skin changes and blood flow to the limb.

Addressing factors in your lifestyle can help to make sure your compression is working as well as possible. Keep as active as possible (see p.19), try and eat healthier (see p.35), lose weight if you need to, and stop smoking or cut down will all help to make sure that your body is able to work with the compression to manage your health.

Compression therapy can be delivered in a few different ways — such as



compression bandages, wraps, or hosiery (see p.32).

## Get the right dose of compression

Compression therapy comes in different strengths, sometimes called ‘doses’. These are measured in millimetres of mercury (mmHg) — the same way blood pressure is measured.

Different pressures or doses are needed for different people — there is no one size fits all. Think of a dose of medicine that is commonly used, for example, paracetamol or antibiotics — the right dose is likely to have the desired effect, while too high a dose can cause harm, and too low a dose will have no effect at all.

## Compression dose

When it comes to the strength or dose of compression hosiery they are grouped into classes, like Class 1, 2, or 3. The exact dose can vary a little depending on the brand or country, but your healthcare professional will choose what’s best for your condition.

## Strong compression

If you have a venous leg ulcer, lymphoedema or chronic oedema you

will be offered a strong compression dose. This maybe in the form of class 2 or class 3 compression hosiery, a hosiery kit, wrap or bandage system.

## Low compression

You may be offered low compression, such as Class 1 compression hosiery or a reduced compression bandage or wrap, if you have a leg ulcer with swelling and also have mild to moderate peripheral arterial disease (poor blood flow to the legs).

Sometimes, your healthcare professional may start you on low compression at your first appointment if they aren’t able to complete a full assessment straight away. Once a full assessment is done (which should be as soon as possible), your dose of compression may be adjusted to better support your leg condition. Your dose of compression may also change depending on which phase of treatment you are in.

Don’t worry about the different numbers or brands — your healthcare professional knows how to choose the right dose and type of compression to help manage your condition safely and effectively. ➡

### Examples of different doses of compression class

| Class   | British Standard hosiery | German standard (RAL) |
|---------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Class 1 | 14–17 mmHg               | 18–21 mmHg            |
| Class 2 | 18–24 mmHg               | 23–32 mmHg            |
| Class 3 | 25–35 mmHg               | 35–46 mmHg            |