



## FACT SHEET: WHAT DOES LYMPHOEDEMA FEEL LIKE?

### What is lymphoedema?

Lymphoedema is a condition which occurs when the lymphatic system has been damaged or becomes blocked, and protein continues to enter the tissues with out having the ability to be drained properly. Due to the protein increase there is an accumulation of fluid entering the tissues causing swelling.

The excess protein can cause fibrosis of tissue and chronic inflammation, making the limb feel hot increasing the risk of infection to the limb. Infection can be very dangerous and needs to be closely monitored to prevent hospitalization.

### What causes Lymphoedema?

- Having too few or too many lymphatics, or an inadequate pump.  
This can occur before birth, during puberty or from 30-40's onwards
- Surgery, especially with removal of lymph nodes
- Radiotherapy, can destroy lymph nodes and cause fibrosis
- Accidental trauma to lymphatic vessels
- Parasites e.g. filarial worms
- Paralysis of limbs
- Chronic venous insufficiency

### What does lymphoedema feel like?

- Feeling of tightness and heaviness in the limb.
- 'Bursting' pains
- Aching buttocks (leg lymphoedema) or back of the shoulder (arm lymphoedema).
- Pins and needles in the limb.
- 'Shooting' pains up the limb.
- A feeling of 'tightness' and tenderness in the elbow or back of the knee.
- Pain in joints (e.g. elbow, knee and ankle), similar to arthritis and often diagnosed as this.
- Tenderness in the groin of an affected leg.
- 'Blown up' abdomen if a leg is affected or in 'lymphoedema-all-over'.
- The limb or affected areas are warmer than other parts - but not red, which suggests infection (SAI) as well.
- In some primary lymphoedemas there can be a very gradual increase in size, but no particular pain - just a feeling of heaviness in the limb. However any infection makes it painful because of the rapid increase in size and the worsening of the lymphoedema that this causes.
- Joints, in particular the knee, can also become lymphoedematous - it feels like (and is often diagnosed as) 'arthritis' - which in a way it is.
- Sometimes lymph can leak through the skin which is then particularly vulnerable to infection.