

## Inspect your feet for:

- Corns/calluses
- Cracks on the skin
- Ingrown toe nails
- Possible sites of infection.

Always wear well-fitting footwear and socks. A list of wider shoe fitting outlets can be provided by your Lymphoedema therapist – please ask.

## Nail care

Nails should be trimmed straight across and not too short.

The nail corners should be gently rounded

If your nails are difficult to cut due to being too wide, too curved or too thick, they may require podiatry input.

If you are unable to reach your nails ask someone to help you with them.

## Equipment which may be useful

**Nail clippers:** Best for safe and effective nail care as they are easy to control. The use of scissors can lead to cuts on adjacent toes.

**Pumice stone:** useful for keeping skin on feet smooth. Care should be taken to rub gently so not to break the skin.

**Nail file:** Useful for smoothing edges of nails to avoid rubbing and irritating adjacent toes or putting holes in hosiery.

All equipment should be cleaned regularly after use by soaking in warm soapy water to avoid build-up of germs.

## Corns and calluses

Caused by the top skin layer thickening to protect from repetitive pressure. The aim is to keep the skin soft and healthy.

They can occur on:

- Soles of the feet, normally caused by the way we walk
- Tops and sides of toes, particularly if the upper of shoes are too tight
- The heel area.

To prevent/treat use a pumice stone daily on corns and calluses, preferably after a bath or shower, when the foot is still wet.

Apply moisturising cream daily to the area.

Padding can be used to reduce pressure on these areas.

## Athlete's foot (Tinea)

Presents as peeling and itching, particularly between toes.

If you have athlete's foot then an antifungal treatment should be used.

If tinea is very resistant to topical treatment or the toe nails develop a fungal infection, then speak with your GP.

## For further information contact:

Therapist: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone No: \_\_\_\_\_

# Skin and nail care in Lymphoedema

## Patient Information

## Skin

**The primary function of your skin is to act as a barrier, preventing bacteria getting to underlying tissues and causing infection.**

Many infections can be avoided by ensuring the skin is well looked after. All breaks in the skin should be treated immediately to reduce the risk of infection.

### What does an infection look like?

The most common bacterial infection that affects patients with lymphoedema is 'Cellulitis'.

Cellulitis is an acute inflammation caused by infection which spreads through the tissues.

Each episode of cellulitis can damage the lymphatic system further and so patients may find their condition gets worse with repeated infections.



### Signs and symptoms

- Temperature
- Flu like symptoms
- Pain in affected limb
- Redness or pinkness
- Increased swelling
- Heat in the affected area.

Some or all of these may be present, but the limb does not have to be scarlet red.

### What to do?

Contact your doctor immediately if you feel you have an infection. Cellulitis is treated with antibiotics. Do not wear any compression garments and rest the swollen area.

Your GP can consult the CREST/GAIN or British Lymphology Society cellulitis guidelines ([www.thebls.com](http://www.thebls.com)).

### Reducing the risk of infection

- Avoid cuts, scratches, burns and insect bites
- Use insect repellent
- Wear gloves during household tasks and when gardening
- Small grazes and cuts should be treated immediately by washing thoroughly, applying antiseptic cream and covering if necessary
- If possible avoid having needles put into your affected limb when having blood taken, injections, a drip or acupuncture
- Avoid walking around barefoot.

### How to maintain good skincare

- Cleanse your skin daily using unscented soap
- Dry the skin thoroughly and gently with a towel afterwards
- Ensure that you dry between any skin folds
- Moisturise using gentle downward strokes daily
- Avoid excessive heat as this can increase swelling ie. avoid hot baths/showers, saunas and extreme temperatures
- Use electric razors instead of normal razors
- Use nail clippers.

### Managing lymph leaking from the skin (Lymphorrhea)

This can happen when an area is very swollen, the skin is very dry, the area of swelling is hard to treat or if there is a break in the skin. The fluid is a straw colour.

#### If this occurs you should:

- Speak to your Lymphoedema therapist for advice
- Contact your community nurse who will assess and treat and redress your wound
- Keep the skin clean and monitor for signs of infection
- Apply a moisturiser around the area of the leak
- Keep your limb elevated when possible
- Apply clean dressings to the area as required, held in place with a soft bandage.

### Ageing skin

With age the skin becomes thinner, loses its elasticity and there is a decreased blood supply. As a result, skin becomes fragile, dry and flaky. This can lead to cracks forming leaving you at risk of infection. Good skin care will reduce this risk.

### Foot care

Feet should be cleaned and checked daily.

- Wash feet well in warm water
- Clean well between toes
- Dry feet thoroughly with a towel particularly between the toes.

Talc is not a substitute for drying. Talc build up and moisture between the toes can provide the perfect environment for germs.