

Oedema Management Techniques – Contrast Bathing

This leaflet provides information about contrast bathing to manage oedema (swelling) in the hand or fingers. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the hand therapist involved in your care.

What is oedema and why have I got it?

Oedema (swelling) is a build-up of excessive fluid in the body which causes the affected tissue to become swollen.

Oedema in the hand can be caused by a variety of conditions or can occur after an injury or surgery to the fingers or hand. After an injury or surgery, your body's natural response is to send fluid to the affected area to start the healing process. With some medical conditions more generalised oedema can occur.

What is contrast bathing?

Contrast bathing is a way of improving the blood supply to the fingers and hand by immersing your hand in a bath of warm water and then cold water. This encourages the blood vessels to open and close, therefore acting as a pump to move fluid away from the area.

What do I do?

For this treatment technique you will need two deep bowls or containers. Fill both containers two thirds full, one with warm tap water, the other with "iced" cold water. Be sure to always **begin with the warm** water and **end with the warm** water to ensure your circulation is not compromised.

Caution: Extra care must be taken if you have injured a nerve. Ensure that the water temperature is neither too hot nor too cold by testing it with your unaffected hand first.

Follow this routine carefully:

Place your hand in the **warm** water, stretch out your hand fully and then make a fist in the water. Do this 10 times.



Place your hand in the **iced** water, stretch out your hand fully and then make a fist in the water. Do this 10 times.



Repeat the above sequence five times and make sure that you **end with the warm** water.

This routine should be completed _____ times a day.

If you are also completing other treatments such as exercises or massage on the hand, complete these directly after contrast bathing. Reduction in swelling will increase the effectiveness of other treatments you have been prescribed.

Useful sources of information

NHS Choices

[Swollen ankles, feet and legs \(oedema\) - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about the oedema in your hand, please contact Hand Therapy on 020 8725 1038 (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5.00pm).

Your therapist is: _____

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



Reference: THE_OMTB_03 Published: February 2023 Review date: February 2025
