

Lymphoedema Compression Garments: How to put on, remove and care for them

This leaflet provides information about compression garments that have been provided to support your self-management of lymphoedema. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

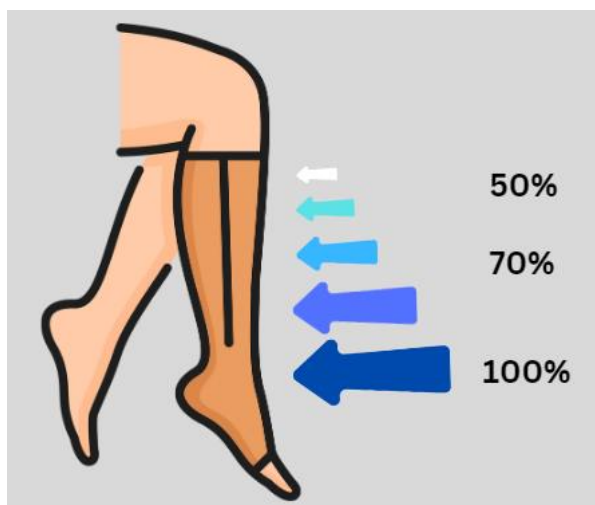
What are compression garments?

The daily use of compression garments should help in the long term to manage the swelling that is affecting you. There are many different types and styles and it is important that you are measured correctly and that you know how to look after the compression garment as well as how to wear it properly and safely.

How do they work?

For an arm or leg, compression garments provide a gradual compression. This means that they should be firmest at the far end (ankle / hand / forearm) and gradually become less tight towards the top.

Compression garments provide resistance on the skin and, when you move, your muscles help to pump the fluid away from the area. By their very nature the garments should be snug yet compressive as this is what makes them work but that can make them also more challenging to put on and take off.



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When should compression garments be worn?

You should wear them whilst you are awake. They should be put on first thing in the morning before gravity encourages the lymph fluid to build up. For many people this means it will be harder for you to apply your garment later during the day.

You should take your garment off before going to bed at night (unless you have been told not to by your lymphoedema therapist).

Moisturisers can make your skin sticky so try to leave a gap of 15 to 20 minutes between applying your moisturiser and putting on your garment (or moisturise at night).

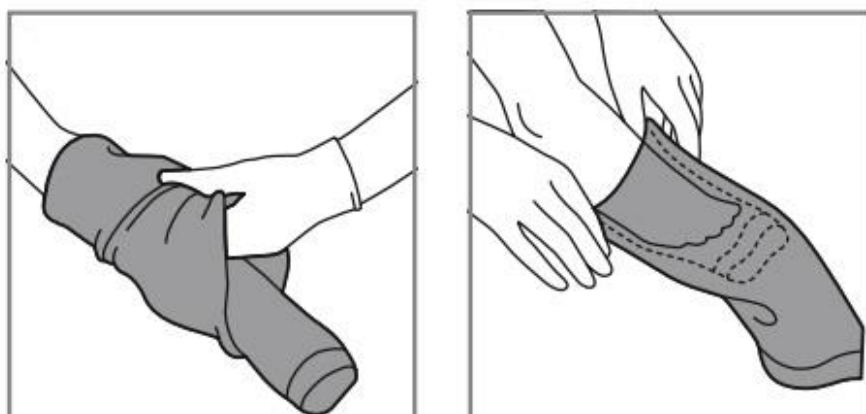
How should I put them on?

Compression garments for your legs (below knee, thigh high and tights).

Try to get yourself into a comfortable position. People tell us that sitting in a chair with a stool in front of you or sitting on your bed with your leg on the bed can be helpful. It depends on your flexibility.

Check the surface on which your feet will be resting. Avoid slippery floors as these can be a hazard. Try a carpeted floor and if you have no carpets at home, an anti-slip mat / Dycem may be helpful.

1. Examine the garment and locate the shaped heel area (heel pocket).
2. Place your hand inside the garment and pinch the heel pocket with your thumb and fingers. Hold it.
3. Grab the top part of your garment with your other hand and turn it inside out all the way to the heel.



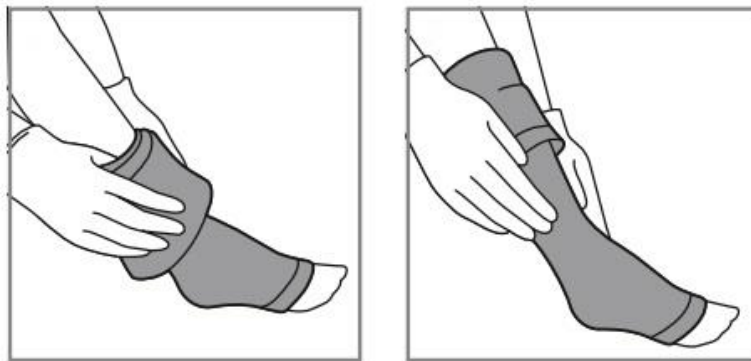
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4. Place your foot into the garment until the heel is in.
5. Grab the leg section of the garment and pull over your foot, heel, up to your lower leg.

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6. You may need to feed the garment in your leg in sections, but it should slide over your heel easier. Do it gradually and try not to pull too strongly by the top band as this can cause damage to fabric and can result in overstretching the garment.



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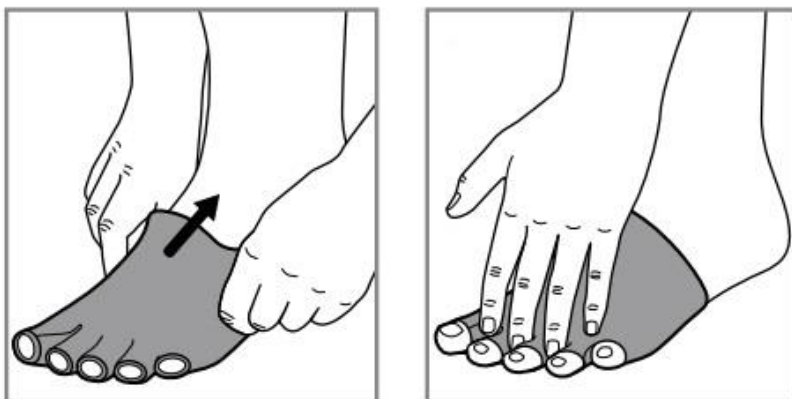
- Make sure that the heel pocket is in place, right at your heel.
- If your garment has a seam, make sure that it is not twisted and it is running straight at the middle of the back of your leg.
- Smooth any wrinkles and creases that may be present.
- Try not to over pull the garment, the fabric colour should be even throughout.
- Check that the garment finishes where it should (good length).
 - Below knee garments should finish about two finger lengths below the knee crease.
 - Thigh high garments, at the front, should go up to the groin as high as it is comfortable and at the back just below your gluteal / buttock fold.



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Putting on toe caps

Place your foot inside toe cap opening. Pull it over your foot so that it fits comfortably around the foot and each toe fits in each individual toe space. Adjust the toe cap in between the toes, push down to web spaces. You can use your fingers, pencil or a spoon handle turned sideways to gently push the toe cap in between the toes down to the web spaces.



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Putting on arm sleeves

1. Fold the top of the arm sleeve down to the elbow section (about halfway down the garment) so that the top of the sleeve is inside-out. Depending on the fabric you may need to expose more of the lower section below the elbow.
2. Holding the fold, slip your hand inside the garment so that the bottom edge of the sleeve is just above the wrist or your hand is inside the attached glove / gauntlet. If you are having difficulties pulling the hand through the garment, try exposing more of the garment on your arm to make it easier
3. Pull the sleeve by the crease until it reaches the elbow. Once the sleeve is in place on the bottom half of the arm, start to pull the upper arm section in place. Sometimes this can be done in one action – sometimes it may need pulling a little at a time

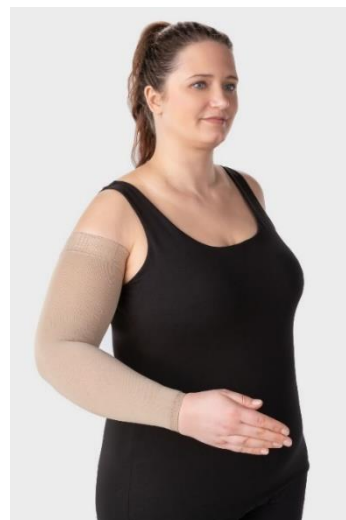


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Check that the arm sleeve starts at the right point, slightly below your wrist and covers your arm up to your armpit (unless told differently by your therapist).

The glove / gauntlet should not be twisted and sit snugly on your hand. Use a mirror to check the fabric is flat and fits well at the top.

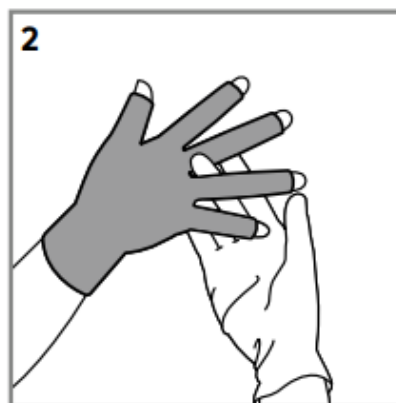
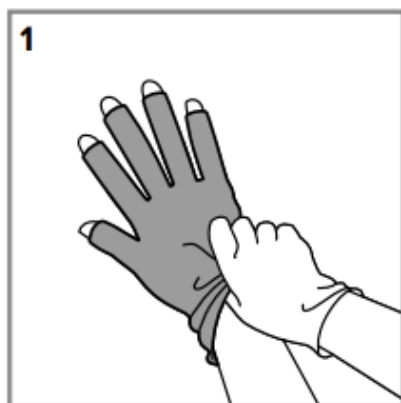
Some sleeves have a marked elbow area (extra stitching) to allow for bending your arm. Make sure that marked elbow area of the sleeve is situated right at your elbow and if needed, make adjustments to the sleeve position.



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Putting on gloves

1. Place your hand inside the glove opening.
2. Pull it down to your wrist, so it fits comfortably around your hand and each finger is in each individual finger space.
3. Pull from the middle of the fabric (picture 1), not the edge, or it may fray.
4. Adjust the glove in between the fingers (picture 2), push down to web spaces. You can use your other hand's fingers to gently push the glove down to the web spaces.



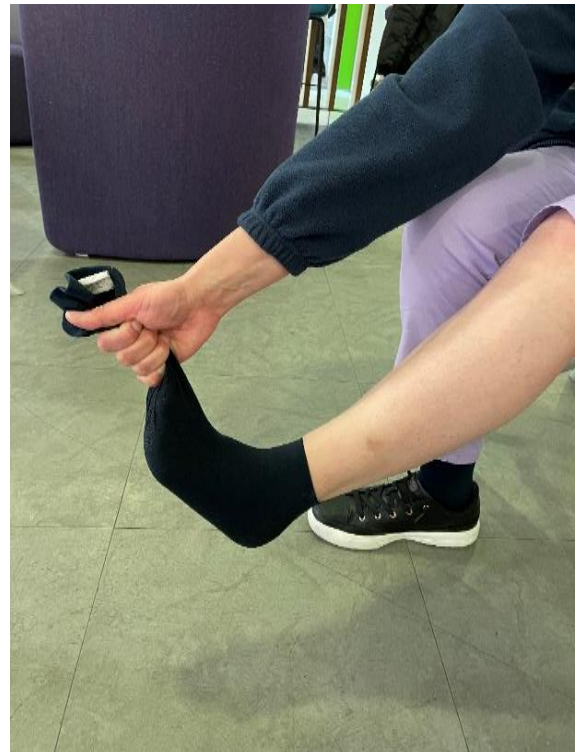
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Remove the glove for hand hygiene. Make sure your hands are washed and dried thoroughly, before reapplying the glove.

How should I take them off?

Removing compression garments for your legs

Remove your garment by pulling it down. Pull downward as the sock doubles over itself. Finally, pull it over your heel, and then off. To get it off your foot, and if your balance allows and the floor is not slippery, you can stand on the top of the garment with your other foot and move your swollen leg backwards so the garment comes off your foot.



Removing compression garments for your arms

Remove your arm sleeve by pulling it down. Pull downward as the sleeve doubles over itself. Finally, pull it over your hand, and then off.

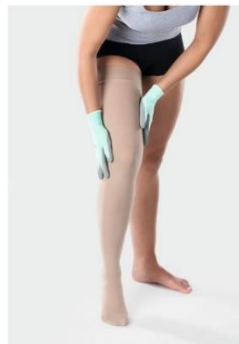
What if I struggle to put them on / take them off?

Aids to help you put on your garments

There are different types of aids to help you to put on and remove your garment. Here are some examples.

Specialist (rubber) gloves

These can make a huge difference as they can help grip more fabric as you put the garment on – the rubber coating gathers the fabric much easier than a fingertip. They will also be beneficial if you have problems with grip strength or fingernail damage. You can try over the counter household dishwashing gloves or try gloves dedicated for compression hosiery.



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Sliding applicators



These sliding aids can be used both with open and closed toe garments and arm sleeves. They come in various sizes.

They work by reducing the friction between the skin and the garments as the fabric is manufactured to be smooth and easy to slide over.

They should come with full instructions as every device operates differently.

Frames

Frames come in different designs, handle lengths and sizes. They are most useful for those with limited mobility who are not able to reach down to the toes or are not able to bring their foot towards their hands. Frames are also available for arm sleeves.



What if my garment doesn't fit me?

My garment is too long

If your garment feels too long you may have over stretched it pulling it on. Place the top of the garment where it is meant to finish and then even out any excess fabric downwards to make it smooth. Overstretched garments cause discomfort when the fabric starts to dig behind the knee crease or elbow, or if excess fabric creases in the groin or armpit. That can also lead to skin irritation.

If you fold the garment over because it is too long you are causing over compression and a tourniquet effect. This can cause increased discomfort and swelling.

My garment is too short

If your garment seems to be too short, check if there is any excess fabric gathering below in a crease / fold that you may have missed, usually at the ankle, wrist or elbow. Pinch the fabric and move it / stretch it up. Repeat it, working your way up to the top of the garment. If that is too difficult you may wish to fold the garment down, inside-out and try to pull the garment by the fold.

My garment is rolling / sliding down

Maybe the garment is too big or you need a silicone top band added. Consider skin glue / adhesive that may help. It is a special 'glue' in a form of roll-on, which should be applied to the skin. It improves adhesion and prevents the garment from sliding. It is washable with warm water.

Ask your lymphoedema therapist if you cannot remedy any of the above problems.

Garment Care

It is important to follow closely the manufacturer's washing and care instructions, as they vary between brands. Washing instructions are present on the label sewn into your garment or are enclosed in the packaging. If you can't find the washing instructions, you can contact the manufacturer or check their website for information.

Washing

Most garments should be washed at a low temperature (30 to 40 degC, using mild detergent, without fabric softeners (conditioners). Most can be washed in a washing machine but hand washing is fine if you prefer it. Some manufacturers recommend turning your garment inside out for washing.

Wash garments regularly, after each use

Unwashed garments have reduced compression strength. Skin cells, sweat and moisturisers accumulate and reduce the effect of the elastic nature of the fibres in the fabric.

Drying

Garments should be air-dried away from a direct source of heat (radiators, tumble-dryer or sun). Direct heat can damage the elastic fibres, weakening the compression level. You can roll up the garment in a towel to speed up the drying process.

Looking after your garments, washing, storing and applying correctly will allow them to last longer.

General tips

- Look after your skin. Dry, rough skin around the feet or long, sharp nails can damage the garment.

- Avoid jewellery that can catch on garments while putting them on or taking them off.
- If you have lymphoedema in your leg or foot, make sure your footwear is fitting you comfortably. Excessive rubbing, e.g. around the heel can cause laddering but also skin irritation or blistering. You may wish to seek advice from a podiatrist if you require specific foot care.
- For more delicate garments, if suitable for machine washing, try using a laundry bag. Alternatively, place your garment inside a pillowcase.

Useful sources of information

British Lymphology Society

Website: www.thebls.com

Telephone: 01452 790 178

Lymphoedema Support Network

Website: www.lymphoedema.org

This network can advise on local support groups that run throughout the UK. Contact them below for details of your local support group.

Email: admin@lsn.org.uk

Telephone: 020 7351 4480

Macmillan Cancer Support

Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

Telephone: 0808 808 00 00 (Available 8am to 8pm)

Macmillan Information and Support Centre

Telephone: 020 8725 2677

Email: cancer.information@stgeorges.nhs.uk

St George's Monday to Friday 9am to 4.30pm (excluding bank holidays)

Queen Mary's Wednesday and Thursday 9am to 4.30pm

Acknowledgements

Images in this leaflet were kindly supplied by Juzo UK Limited.

Other sources: canva.com and own photo collection.

Contact us

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

Was this information helpful? Yes / No

Please let us know, contact patient.information@stgeorges.nhs.uk and include the leaflet title.

Thank you.

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm

Friday between 10am and 2pm.

The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings.

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

NHS UK

The NHS 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.

