

Lymph node surgery for cancer of the penis: guide to prevent lymphoedema

This leaflet should answer some of the questions that you may have about the risks of developing lymphoedema after surgery to your lymph nodes. If you have any further questions or worries during this time please contact the specialist nursing team listed in the back of this leaflet.

What is lymphoedema?

Lymphoedema is a chronic swelling, caused by the build up of lymph fluid.

What is the lymphatic system?

The lymphatic system is a network of fine vessels, which lie directly under your skin. Their function is to clear away waste products, which are then carried in the lymph to the lymph glands or nodes. Here the harmful products are filtered off and bacteria are attacked.

Why am I at risk of lymphoedema?

The surgery you are about to have will remove lymph nodes at the top of your leg. Your surgeon will explain why this is important for you but one side effect of this is that the lymphatic system may not work as well as it used to and a build up of fluid may occur in the leg, foot or groin area. This can happen immediately after surgery or many years later.

How can I prevent this from happening?

There are a number of ways that you can protect yourself from developing lymphoedema:

1. Look after your skin. Dryness can cause cracks in the skin which are an ideal place for germs to enter. When washing pat your skin dry, taking care to dry between your toes and use a moisturising cream such as aqueous cream.
2. Take care when cutting your toenails. If you think you may have an infection such as athlete's foot you should visit your GP to get it treated.
3. Treat every small cut or graze promptly by cleaning well and applying antiseptic.
4. Be careful of pets scratching or biting you.
5. Avoid tight clothing such as socks and waistbands.
6. Protect your skin from extremes of temperature and sunburn.
7. Watch your weight! Being overweight makes it more difficult for the lymph to drain out.

What about exercise?

Regular, gentle exercise is very important, especially after surgery, but you should be careful not to do anything too strenuous. Increasing your exercise levels suddenly or lifting heavy weights can put too much demand on your lymphatic system and lead to swelling. If you do overdo things you may notice your 'at risk' limb aches or becomes pink, hot or swollen. Standing still for long periods or repetitive movements may also cause swelling.

What about travelling?

When going on holiday you should make sure you have a supply of insect repellent and antiseptic cream. A two week supply of antibiotics can be obtained from your GP to start if you notice any signs of infection. These may be red, hot areas on your leg or groin or a 'flu-like' feeling.

What are the signs of lymphoedema?

Any new swelling, pain, discomfort or redness in the affected groin or leg may indicate lymphoedema.

Who can I contact for advice?

The uro-oncology nursing team will be able to give you basic advice and can refer you to the Lymphoedema services if necessary. If you do have any queries or think you are developing lymphoedema then please ring them on the number below. Do not wait for your next hospital appointment as lymphoedema can be treated much more successfully if caught early.

- Uro-Oncology Clinical Nursing Specialist team on: 0118 322 7905
- We work Monday- Friday 8.30-4pm. There is an answer machine and we will return your call if we are not in the office.

Useful contacts

The Lymphoedema Support Network, Tel: 0207 351 4480, www.lymphoedema.org/lsn

Macmillan Cancer Support, Telephone: 0808 808 0000, www.macmillan.org.uk

Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust

London Road, Reading RG1 5AN

0118 322 5111 (switchboard)

www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

If you require this document in another language or would prefer it in large print, please call 0118 322 7905.

Uro-oncology nursing team

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