

## SPECIFIC EXERCISES

# Get moving with lymphoedema

Your lymphoedema practitioner or other health professional will be able to advise on how often and how many of each of the suggested movements to do. However, it is good to start with a few once or twice a day, then increase gradually. You don't need to do all the movements. If you can manage them easily, discuss more challenging movements with your specialist of health professional.

### 01 To improve lymph flow and drainage

All lymph flows towards large vessels in the chest and neck area before draining into the blood circulation. Deep breathing and simple stretching of this area gives lymph flow a boost.

1. Take some slow deep breaths to start – deep enough to feel your rib cage stretching outwards. If possible stretch your arms out to the side as far as you can, so that you are stretching your rib cage and expanding your chest and lungs.
2. Make some exaggerated A, E, I, O, U movements with your mouth so that your face and neck muscles stretch.
3. Move your head slowly to one side as you breath out slowly, looking over one shoulder, until you feel a slight stretch in your neck, return to centre and then turning to the other side.

4. Move your chin down towards your chest as you breathe out slowly, return to start as you breathe in, then raise your chin and look upwards as you breathe out again, returning to the start as you breathe in. This will stretch the front and back of your neck and upper chest.
5. Do some slow shoulder shrugs, drawing your shoulders up towards your ears and then relaxing them down.
6. Do some slow circles with your shoulders moving them forwards, upwards, back and down. Then do the same going backwards first. You can also do this starting with your elbows bent and raised to shoulder level and it allows more movement of the shoulder joints.

### 02 To help with arm swelling

1. Start with some deep breaths, simple neck stretches and shoulder shrugs and circles like exercise 01.

If you're able, raise your arm slowly out to the side a few times to as close to shoulder height as you can. Then raise the arm out in front of you to as high as you can comfortably manage. Doing this with both your affected and unaffected arm is good for keeping your shoulder joints flexible.

2. With your affected arm supported on a pillow or cushion, try bending and straightening your arm at the elbow a few times.
3. Make a fist and then stretch your fingers out straight a few times.
4. Rotate your wrist in one direction a few times, then repeat the other way.
5. Start with your arm and hand face down and bend your wrist so that your fingers are pointing upwards, then bend in the other direction, so that the fingers point downwards.

### 03 To help with leg swelling

1. Start with some deep breaths, simple neck stretches and shoulder shrugs and circles as you did in exercise 01.
2. Bend and straighten one knee slowly a few times. If you do this standing, make sure you are able to hold onto something for support and balance. Do the same for the other leg.
3. In a sitting or lying position, with your leg straight, pull your toes up towards you as far as you can so that your ankle and calf feels a stretch, then point them away from you to stretch the front of your foot. Repeat a few times.
4. If standing, e.g. waiting in a queue, you can do the above by stretching slowly up on to your tiptoes, and relaxing back down. This can be done one foot at a time or both feet together, but make sure you are able to support yourself by holding onto something.
5. You can add to the above by stretching up onto your tiptoes, then once your feet are flat on the ground, raise your toes up so you are rocking your weight back onto your heels. You should feel a slight stretch in your ankles and calf muscles. Again make sure you have support to keep your balance.
6. Slowly circle each foot a few times to stretch your ankles. This can be done sitting or standing.

### 04 Activity to help with genital or abdominal swelling

Deep breathing exercises can be really helpful, with the addition of pelvic floor or abdominal exercises. Your lymphoedema practitioner or other health professional will be able to advise on how to do these.

### 05 Activity to help with swelling of the face, head or neck

1. Start with some deep breaths, simple neck stretches and shoulder shrugs and circles to stimulate lymph flow generally as you did for exercise 01. This is really important for swelling in this area.
2. Make some exaggerated A,E,I,O,U movements with your mouth so that your face and neck muscles stretch can be particularly helpful. Simply opening and closing your mouth widely is also a good stretch for facial muscles.
3. Rapid blinking can help if there is swelling around the eyes.
4. Keeping your head still, rolling your eyes to look up as much as you can, holding for a couple of seconds, then looking downwards, then to each side is also useful for swelling around the eyes.
5. Chewing gum, sticking out your tongue or any movement that moves skin and muscles of the face is good. Singing loudly is great for the movement and because you need to take bigger breaths.

### 06 Activity to help with swelling of the breast/ chest area.

1. Start with some deep breaths, simple neck stretches and shoulder shrugs and circles as you did in exercise 01.
2. If you are able, raise your arm slowly out to the side a few times to as close to shoulder height as you can. Then raise the arm out in front of you to as high as you can comfortably manage. Doing this with both your affected and unaffected arm is good for keeping your shoulder joints flexible.

