

The Importance of Good Skin Care with Lymphedema

Good skin care is important for patients with lymphedema. Proper skin care helps:

- Decrease the amount of germs found on the skin
- Reduce the risk of infection
- Prevent skin breakdown, ulcers or open wounds
- Prevent lymphedema from getting worse

Keeping your skin clean is important and can help prevent problems with your skin, such as redness, itching or developing a rash or irritation in your skin folds (called Intertrigo). Cleaning your skin each day helps keep your skin healthy and prevents these changes from becoming permanent.

Tips for Keeping Your Skin Clean and Healthy to Prevent Infection

- Put lotion that is free of perfumes and dyes on your skin 1 to 2 times each day. Use a low pH level (between 4 and 6) lotion to keep your skin moist and to prevent tiny tears in the skin that can increase your risk of infection. Below is a list of lotions with their pH level:

Name	pH Level	Name	pH Level
Cerave	5.68	Eucerin Original Dry Skin Therapy Lotion	5.97
Aveeno Daily Moisturizing Lotion	5.82	Cetaphil Daily Advance Ultra Hydrating Lotion	5.65
Vaseline Intensive Rescue Skin Protectant Body Lotion	4.30	Aquaphor Lotion	5.19

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

- Bathe or shower every other day to prevent germs and fungus from growing on your skin.
- If you are unable to manage bathing and skin care on your own, talk to your doctor about a referral to Occupational Therapy or Podiatry. These services can help you develop a skin care routine and suggest modifications or equipment to help make skin care easier for you.
- Items that may be helpful to use when you check, clean and care for your skin include:
 - ▶ Long handled sponge/scrubber
 - ▶ Long-handled reacher to use with wash cloths/towels
 - ▶ Bath mitt
 - ▶ Foot scrubber, such as Soapy Soles
 - ▶ Nail brush with suction cups
 - ▶ Adaptive nail clippers / long-reach toenail scissors
 - ▶ Long handled lotion aid / roll-on lotion aid
 - ▶ Antimicrobial fabric, such as InterDry, to use in skin folds to keep the area dry
 - ▶ Leg lifter to raise feet
 - ▶ Handheld shower head
 - ▶ Tub bench
 - ▶ Shower chair
 - ▶ Long-handled hair washer, brush, comb and mirror
 - ▶ Hair dryer stand
 - ▶ Extension razor holder / electric razor strap
 - ▶ Sock aide
 - ▶ Dressing stick

These adaptive grooming aides can be bought online and are also available at many pharmacy/retail stores.

- Wash your hands often to prevent the spread of germs to your own body and to others.
 - ▶ How to Wash Your Hands
 1. Turn on the water to warm. Adjust the flow so the water does not splash.
 2. Wet your hands.
 3. Rub soap over your wet hands. It is best to use liquid soap.
 4. Lather your palms and the back of your hands and wrists. Rub your hands together on all sides, between your fingers and around your nails for at least 15 seconds.
 5. You may use a nail brush to clean under and around your nails.
 6. Rinse your hands well with warm water and **leave the water running.**
 7. Dry your hands with a paper towel or clean towel. Use the towel in your hand to turn off the water and open the door. This keeps your clean hand from touching the faucet and door handle, which are not clean.
- Keep your fingernails and toenails trimmed and well groomed. Scratching your skin with dirty fingernails lets germs enter the skin, which can cause an infection or swelling.
- Wash your feet, including in between your toes, each day.
- Keep all areas of your skin clean and dry to prevent a yeast infection or rash from developing in the folds of your skin.
 - ▶ You may find it helpful to use powder in areas that are hard to keep dry (skin folds, toes and fingers)
- Keep your hair well groomed and wash it at least 2 to 3 times each week to prevent a buildup of grease on the scalp.
- Regular bathing and changing your clothes each day, especially your underwear, can help prevent and control the spread of head, body and pubic lice. Scratching to ease the itching caused by lice can make your skin become raw and increase your risk for infection. **It is important to tell your health care team if you have this problem.**
- Change your bedding regularly to prevent the buildup of dry skin cells, bacteria, and moisture on your sheets and mattress. Change your linens more often during warmer months.

- Wear shoes when outside to prevent cuts and scrapes on your feet.
- Check your skin for bug bites. Bed bugs cause such bad itching that you may scratch enough to cause breaks in your skin, which can easily become infected. Bed bugs can be hard to kill, so it is best to call a professional pest control company to get rid of them. **It is important to tell your health care team if you have this problem.**
- If you have a cut, scrape or wound, you should wash it each day with soap and water and cover it with a bandage to keep it clean and dry. Call your doctor if the cut, scrape or wound does not get better. Your doctor may refer you to the Wound Care Clinic for further evaluation and treatment.