

Wrapping Your Arm to Control Lymphedema

The lymph system helps to get rid of waste products from your cells and helps your body fight infection. Lymphedema can happen when your lymph nodes are unable to drain fluid from your tissues. This can cause swelling in your arms or legs. This guide will show you how to wrap your arm to control the swelling caused by lymphedema. This wrapping method is called multi-layer, short-stretch bandaging. Your physical therapist will show you how to wrap your arm and will tell you if you need to wrap your fingers.

Supplies:

- Lotion
- Stockinette
- Bandages:
 - ▶ Padded, fluffy bandage
 - ▶ Brown compression bandages
- Tape

Here are basic guidelines:

- Your bandages should be wrapped just tight enough to stay in place and feel firm. Bandages should not be too tight or too loose. Bandages that are too tight can cause pain, numbness, or tingling in your arm or hand. If you have these symptoms, remove your bandages. **Do not** wrap your arm again until your symptoms are gone.
- **Do not** tug on your bandages or stretch them when you wrap your arm.

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

- To protect your skin from irritation and scratches, use tape to hold the end of your bandages in place. **Do not** use metal clips. **Do not** put tape on your skin.
- Unless told otherwise by your therapist, keep your arm wrapped for 23 hours a day. You can remove your wrap when you bathe or shower.

Instructions for Wrapping Your Arm

Step 1:

To prevent dryness, use a low pH lotion on your arm. Let the lotion soak into your skin before you wrap your arm. Pull on the stockinette from your hand up to the top of your arm. The stockinette should stop about 2 inches from your shoulder.

Cut a small hole at the bottom of the stockinette for your thumb. This hole should be about 2 inches from the edge of your stockinette.



Step 2:

Wrap the padded, fluffy bandage around your arm. Start by wrapping over your wrist, then wrap over the hand two times. Continue to wrap all the way up to your shoulder.

It is important to use enough padding to make your arm the same width from your wrist up to your shoulder. You may need to use more padding around smaller areas of your arm, such as your wrist and forearm.



Step 3:

Use 2 brown compression bandages to cover the fluffy padding. It is important to keep your fingers slightly spread apart when you wrap your arm with these bandages.

Change the direction you wrap with each bandage you use. As you wrap, overlap about half the width of the bandage.

The bandage should be just tight enough to stay in place. The compression bandage should cover the fluffy padding completely.

It is important to check your fingers for blood flow to make sure your wrap is not too tight.

- Use the smallest bandage first. Make an anchor wrap around your wrist to hold the bandage in place.
- Wrap the bandage 1 to 2 times around your hand with your thumb out. This will make it easier for you to move your hand. Wrap the bandage to cover your knuckles.
- Make a fist with your hand and start to wrap up your arm. Continue to wrap your arm until the bandage ends. Use tape to hold the end in place.
- Use the larger bandage to wrap your arm in the opposite direction. Use tape to hold the end in place.



Other instructions you may be given:

It is important to re-wrap your arm if the bandages start to slip or feel loose. This can happen as your swelling goes down.

Sometimes foam may be added to your bandage. The foam may be cut to fit the shape of your arm or small foam chips may be put into a small fabric bag. Your therapist will tell you if you need to use foam and show you how to use it.

Physical Therapist: _____

Phone Number: _____