

Upper Limb Unit

Hand Therapy: Oedema Control

Introduction

The treatment of oedema (swelling) is very important in the rehabilitation of your hand or arm. The following techniques can be used to decrease swelling and improve your overall hand function. Only perform the techniques that are shown to you by your therapist, for as long as the swelling persists.

Elevation

For elevation to be effective the hand must be above the heart.

- Keep your hand raised as much as possible during the day. You may wear a sling if this has been provided but this is not necessary in many cases. Your therapist will advise you accordingly.
- Pillows may be used to raise the hand or arm when sitting and whilst in bed at night.

Contrast baths

Alternating hot and cool water produces a pump action which can help fluid to drain from the hand. You will require two bowls large enough to fit your hand in, one filled with hot water and the other with colder water.

1. Starting with warm water, immerse the hand and slowly make a fist using a sponge, ten times
2. Repeat step 1 using the cold water
3. Complete this process 10 times in total
4. Dry your hands and carry out retrograde massage- see page 2

It is important to begin this treatment with a small difference in temperatures and gradually increase the difference.

Your therapist will tell you how many times a day you need to carry out contrast bathing, but three to four times daily is the amount often recommended.

Compression

Coban taping is a form of external compression that may help to reduce swelling.

- Start at the end of your finger, leaving the very tip exposed. Wrap the coban tape from the finger tip to the base for finger swelling, or from the knuckles to the wrist for hand swelling. Overlap the tape by half each time. Your therapist will demonstrate this technique. **Do not over stretch** the coban.
- Your movement should not be significantly reduced with the wrap in place. It is very important to exercise whilst wearing the coban as this will help to reduce swelling.
- Observe finger tips closely. If the finger turns blue or dark pink, the coban is too tight and needs to be adjusted.



Patient Information

- The coban should be worn for a **maximum** of 30 minutes at a time.
- If the coban causes pain or irritation remove it **immediately**. Please be aware that coban wrap contains latex. If you are aware of a latex allergy please advise your therapist.

You may alternatively be supplied with a digi-sleeve. This is an elasticated stocking for the finger and works in a similar way to coban wrapping.

Retrograde massage

Retrograde massage helps to push fluid out of the hand. This should be performed with the hand raised. It may be more comfortable to massage with a cream or moisturiser.

1. Using firm pressure with your other hand, massage from the fingertips in a downwards motion.
2. Move down the hand and arm towards your body.

This massage should be completed each time you have completed the exercise regime advised by your therapist.

Ice

Inflamed joints are generally hot and swollen. Ice helps to reduce the inflammation and any pain. Apply ice after exercise or as required to treat swelling.

- Place a clean tea towel over the affected area.
- Place a small bag of crushed ice, gel pack or packet of frozen peas on the area. **Do not put** ice in direct contact with the skin as this may cause a burn.
- Leave ice for a maximum of 20 minutes before removing unless it becomes uncomfortable. Allow a period of two hours between each application.

If you suffer any adverse effects from using ice, remove it immediately and do not reapply until further discussion with your therapist. If your sensation is reduced check your skin regularly during use of ice to ensure no damage is occurring.

Exercise

If you have been given a home exercise programme carrying this out on a regular basis will help to reduce oedema. Working with your hand in a raised position will assist the process further.

Please speak to your therapist regarding any information in this leaflet or contact us on **024 7696 6013** for physiotherapy at **University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire** or **01788 663257** for physiotherapy at **St Cross Hospital Rugby**

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