

## How Can the Lymphoedema Physiotherapy Service Help?

The physiotherapy department lymphoedema therapists offer a range of treatment and management options.

We provide you with knowledge and understanding of the lymphatic system, how it works and why lymphoedema occurs.

There are simple exercises and daily routines that we can teach you in order to minimise your symptoms.

If appropriate, a specialised individual bandaging program can be done in an effort to reduce the amount of swelling in the affected area.

Compression garments can be ordered and fitted by our lymphoedema therapist's.

We do not offer massage, but our therapists can show you manual lymphatic drainage which aims to reduce the amount of swelling in the affected area for you to complete at home.

We are committed to a team approach with medical care givers.

## Accessing the Lymphoedema Physiotherapy Service

No referral is necessary although referrals from medical practitioners and results of relevant tests are welcomed.

**Cost:** Free



### FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

#### Physiotherapy

Swan Hill District Health

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## Lymphoedema Physio Service

Physiotherapy service specialising in the prevention, management and treatment of lymphoedema

## What is Lymphoedema?

Lymphoedema occurs when the lymphatic system does not function properly and causes swelling. It usually occurs in the arms or legs, but can affect other parts of the body.

The lymphatic system is a very important system. It removes extra fluid from your tissues back into circulation. Lymph nodes work to clean the extra fluid by removing bacteria and dead or abnormal cells. This helps to prevent any infections entering our circulation.

If the lymphatic system in a particular area is not working properly, extra fluid can build up in the tissues creating swelling known as lymphoedema. This fluid is characterised by having high levels of protein.

While swelling is the most common symptom of lymphoedema, others include a feeling of tightness or heaviness, and sometimes pain in the affected area.

## What causes Lymphoedema?

The causes of lymphoedema are divided into two main groups.

### **Primary Lymphoedema**

In some people the lymphatic system doesn't develop normally. Either there are not enough vessels or the vessels don't function properly. This is usually detected during childhood.

Family members of someone who has been known to have had lymphoedema are more likely to also be affected.

### **Secondary Lymphoedema**

This type is caused by damage to an otherwise normal, healthy lymphatic system. Most commonly after cancer related surgery or radiation. While such therapies are necessary in the treatment of cancer, the lymphatic system can be damaged in the process, leading to signs and symptoms of lymphoedema

## What can I do?

Anyone who is at risk of lymphoedema should see a lymphoedema therapist.

People who are at risk include anyone who's ever had;

- A lumpectomy
- A mastectomy
- A sentinel node biopsy
- An axillary clearance
- Gynaecological or prostate cancer surgery or radiation
- Other surgery or radiation

Symptoms such as swelling and pain may not necessarily occur immediately after these treatments. For this reason if you've had any of the above it's a good idea to see a lymphoedema therapist even if you have no symptoms.

There are lots of simple things that can be done to prevent lymphoedema from occurring. Your lymphoedema therapist can give you advice regarding how to reduce your chances of developing lymphoedema and also assist you with ways to minimise any symptoms you may experience.