

### Further information

If you require any further information after reading this leaflet, please contact:

Occupational Therapy Service  
Warwick Hospital  
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Tel no: 01926 600818 option 5  
<https://www.swft.nhs.uk/>

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As a key provider of healthcare and as an employer, the Trust has a statutory obligation to promote and respect equality and human rights. This is set out in various pieces of legislation including: Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, Disability Discrimination Act (2005), Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Age Discrimination Act (2006)

Our information for patients can also be made available in other languages, Braille, audio tape, disc or in large print

We offer a Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS). This is a confidential service for patients and their families to help with any questions or concerns about local health services.

You can contact the service by the direct telephone line on 01926 600054 or using the phone links which are available in both hospitals or calling in at the office located in the main entrance at Warwick hospital.

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# South Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust

## OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

### Hand and Upper Limb Service

## *Oedema Management*

### *Patient Information*

SWH-00335

## What is oedema?

Oedema (swelling) is the accumulation of fluid within the tissues of the body. This fluid tends to accumulate where the skin is loose and elastic (i.e. the back of the hand and on both sides of the fingers).

Oedema is the body's natural response to an injury or surgery. Oedema is part of the first stage of the normal healing process. In some cases, complications may arise as a result of persistent, untreated oedema.

## How long will my oedema last?

It is difficult to determine how long oedema will last. Your oedema may fluctuate depending on time of day, activities performed, positioning and other factors.

## Complications from oedema if not treated quickly and effectively:

If left untreated, one or more of the following complications may occur:

- Delayed healing
- Pain
- Stiffness
- Joint contractures (fixed position)
- Compromised function
- Anxiety
- Vascular disruption (altered circulation)
- Cosmesis (appearance)

## How do we treat oedema?

You may be given one or a combination of the following treatments to treat your oedema:

## Elevation

- For elevation to be effective, the hand and the elbow should be higher than your heart.
- Pillows can be used to elevate the hand and elbow when sitting or in bed at night.

## Active Exercise

- If you have been given a personalised exercise programme, carrying this out will help reduce oedema.
- Working with your hand in an elevated (raised) position will assist the process further.

## Compression

- Compression, combined with exercise, will assist in reducing oedema.
- Either a glove, compression tape or elasticated tubes are used to help reduce oedema. Directions for use will be given by your therapist.

## Retrograde Massage

- A massage technique performed from the finger tips down your arm towards the body in an elevated position. Directions on massage will be given by your therapist.

## Hot/Cold Therapies (Contrast baths)

- Alternating soaks of the affected area between warm and cold water. This improves the blood supply to the area which aids healing and re-absorption of oedema. Directions will be given by your therapist.