

Doctors Corner: Multi-Layer Lymphoedema Bandaging (MLLB)

Can be used as part of the management of lymphoedema for both arm and leg swelling. We also do other areas of the body too. MLLB is used because many layers of different types of bandages are applied during the treatment. MLLB is sometimes used during an intensive course of treatment called Decongestive Lymphoedema Therapy (DLT) or Combined Decongestive Therapy (CDT) and is often used in conjunction with Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD), skin care and exercise.

To make this treatment effective short stretch bandages are usually used and sometimes long stretch bandages. The bandages create a resistance for the muscles to work against, improving the lymphatic drainage as well as preventing further build-up of swelling in the limb. The bandages also offer support and comfort to some patients where the swollen limb feels tight and taught. In most instances, bandages will be applied to the fingers or toes, depending on which limb is being bandaged; this is helping prevent the lymph from entering into these areas during MLLB.

Patients suitable for MLLB:

- 1 great distortion of limb shape.
- 2 Limb volume exceeds 20%, unless uniform in shape.
- 3 Lymphorrhoea (leaking of lymph through the skin).
- 4 skin conditions which may be aggravated by pulling on / off the garment.

Patients not suitable for MLLB.

- 1 arterial insufficiency (poor circulation).
- 2 an acute inflammatory stage (i.e. cellulitis).
- 3 cardiac failure is present.

Benefits of MLLB

MLLB can dramatically improve overall swelling and may help to reduce the severity of symptoms:

Improve drainage (by encouraging re-absorption of tissue fluid and preventing fluid leaking into the tissues).

Improve movement and function of the limb (by reducing the overall size/weight of the limb).

Improve distorted limb shape so that hosiery can be fitted.

Reduce thickening fibrotic inflammation of the skin.

Reverse lymphorrhoea (leaking of lymph through the skin).

Decrease excessive limb size.

Treatment

After assessment by Susanna, diary dates and appointments are then booked.

MLLB is generally carried out on a daily basis; usually lasting about 2-4 weeks (can include weekends). The number of treatments depends on each case but Susanna can give you a rough idea.

Before treatment your limb volume will be taken. Then a MLD session. Followed by MLLB. Susanna will give you an exercise sheet as exercise with your MLLB makes the treatment far more effective. At the start of MLLB, Susanna uses a moisturising cream as MLLB in order to keep your skin moist and nourished.

Daily – Bandages are removed and the limb is expected for any changes in case any problems. Also to note any positive changes and to address any further changes in the MLLB.

Washed using the appropriate lotion.

Then dried carefully.

MLD is then given.

Skin care and the appropriate cream applied.

MLLB is applied.

The ridged leg may not be easy to move but it is very important general exercise is undertaken so that the effects of the bandages can work.

Patient consideration:

Do wear loose clothing and larger footwear.

MLLB should not cause any pain, numbness, pins and needles or discolouration.

With the shift in fluid, it rarely causes any problems with breathing but if it does, remove your MLLB and contact your GP ASAP.

Slippage of the bandages is common as the swelling reduce, (hence daily changes).

Do not push objects down your bandages if the skin is itchy, Susanna can use a different cream to help reduce the itch. Trying to itch only opens up the skin to infections. Tapping the area can help.

After MLLB

Your measurements are taken, assessed and differences noted.

Shape of your limb, tissues, softness, skin condition and swellings.

Your limb will then be measured for your compression hosiery garments. These will be of a higher pressure and very often custom made.

Sometimes 'rebounding' (swelling may slightly increase) occurs as the pressure of your MLLB and Garments is different.

Maintenance

After MLLB completion, there are four important phases.

1 – Daily use of your Garments.

2 – Exercise

3 – Simple Lymphatic Drainage (LSN become a member and buy their great DVD on arm or leg SLD) or MLD.

4 – Skin care, every day wash your skin in the emollient. Dry carefully. Apply prescribed moisturiser. Do not apply moisturiser just before you put on your garment, as the moisturiser upsets the elastic balance of your garment.