

Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in the UK. About 46,000 women get breast cancer in the UK each year. Most of them (8 out of 10) are over 50, but younger women and, in rare cases, men can also get breast cancer.

Coping with a cancer diagnosis and resulting treatment is an emotionally and physically difficult journey for the patient and their family. Following the removal of lymph nodes and radiation therapy, Secondary Lymphoedema or swelling of the arm affects about 25% of breast cancer patients. Symptoms of Secondary Lymphoedema can include:



- a feeling of fullness or heaviness
- tightness and stretching of the skin
- swelling
- reduced movement of the joints
- thickening and dryness of the skin
- discomfort and/or pain
- clothing, shoes or jewellery (such as rings or watches) feeling tighter than usual

This condition can cause additional pain, discomfort and anxiety, however, it can also be successfully treated and managed by a non invasive therapy called, Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD).

So what is Manual Lymphatic Drainage?

Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD) is a very gentle, light touch massage used to treat and control different types of lymphoedema or swelling of

an arm, leg or other part of the body due to an abnormal build-up of a fluid called lymph in the body tissues. MLD uses the lymphatic system to cleanse the body, reduce and ease swelling and strengthen the immune system by stimulating the flow of lymph.

The lymphatic system is an important part of the body's defenses against infection. It is made up of groups of lymph nodes or glands throughout the body, connected by a network of lymphatic vessels. It contains cells which fight infection, transports excess fluid from body tissues and gets rid of waste and bacteria.

How is MLD used to treat Secondary Lymphoedema?

MLD therapists treat lymphoedema using Complex Decongestive Therapy (CDT); an intensive treatment that combines Manual Lymphatic Drainage, compression garments, exercise and skin care.

The therapist uses a range of specialised and gentle rhythmic pumping techniques to move the excess fluid into an area with a working lymph vessel system. This stimulates the lymphatic vessels and helps move excess fluid away from the swollen area so that it can drain away normally.

The MLD treatment is followed by the fitting of compression garments, to reduce limb size. The therapist will also discuss how to minimise the risk of infection by washing and moisturising the skin and the importance of regular gentle exercise to encourage efficient lymph flow.

How long will the treatment take?

The treatment of lymphoedema falls roughly into two categories:

- Phase One - an intensive treatment period for reduction of the swollen area
- Phase Two - a maintenance phase intended to keep the area as reduced as possible after the intensive Phase One treatment

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Both phases follow the four cornerstones of lymphoedema treatment as described in the 1984 Macmillan report on lymphoedema treatment: skincare; exercises; bandaging (or compression); and Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD).

The first visit to a trained MLD^{UK} practitioner will include a consultation during which the therapist will measure the affected area(s) and recommend the number and frequency of future sessions. Each session will last approximately one hour. Where appropriate the therapist will work in conjunction with your medical practitioner



Routes to Therapy

If you notice any symptoms contact your GP, Consultant or Breast Cancer Nurse who should refer you to the nearest specialist lymphoedema clinic or qualified NHS therapist.

Alternatively visit the MLD^{UK} website at www.mlduk.org.uk to locate your nearest properly trained and accredited MLD practitioner.

MLD^{UK} members are qualified, insured, and up-to-date in their education and practice.

MLD^{UK} members are recognised by Bupa and a number of other health insurance companies for conditions such as lymphoedema.

About MLD^{UK}

MLD^{UK} is a professional association of manual lymphatic drainage practitioners. It ensures a high standard of training amongst its members, promotes the education of health professionals with regard to MLD and raises public awareness of MLD and its therapeutic applications.

MLD^{UK} is recognised and recommended by the following organisations and individuals:

- Lymphoedema Support Network (LSN)
- British Lymphology Society (BLS)
- Macmillan Cancer Support
- Cancerbackup
- Professor Peter Mortimer – St George's and Royal Marsden Hospitals, London

For more information
and to find your nearest MLD^{UK} therapist:

call
0844 800 1988

visit
www.mlduk.org.uk