

Overweight, Obesity & Chronic Oedema



The aim of this leaflet is to explain the link between being overweight, obese and chronic limb oedema (swelling). Even if you are not overweight and obese at the moment, gaining weight can have a significant impact on your swelling. **Effective management of your chronic limb oedema can be compromised if you are overweight and obese.**

The World Health Organization (WHO) define overweight and obese as: "excessive fat accumulation that may impair health"; it is measured by making a calculation based on height in metres squared, divided by body weight to equal your body mass index or BMI:

- a BMI greater than or equal to 25 is defined as overweight.
- a BMI greater than or equal to 30 is defined as obese.

In the chronic oedema service your weight may also be assessed by measuring you around your girth (waist). If you are overweight and obese you will need to lose weight to achieve good results from your management (reducing swelling and other symptoms). Though the WHO define overweight and obese differently in terms of BMI, both can lead to and contribute to a range of diseases including heart disease, some cancers and diabetes.



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Can being overweight and obese cause or contribute to the development and treatment of chronic oedema including lymphoedema?

An increasing body of evidence including research and expert opinion clearly link being overweight and obese with the development of a range of health problems including chronic oedema.

Excessive weight may contribute to lower limb oedema because of:

- Additional fluid in the fatty tissue
- Pressure from fat on lymphatic vessels stopping them working effectively

- Impaired diaphragmatic breathing; people who are obese cannot breathe as efficiently. Efficient breathing helps lymph fluid and blood move around the body
- It may be more difficult to be active if you are overweight or obese; when we exercise or are active the muscles help pump fluid away from our limbs and stop it pooling in legs and feet.

People who are overweight or obese are more likely to have diseased veins (chronic venous disorder) that can lead to:

- Varicose veins
- Leg ulcers
- Swelling (chronic oedema)

Eventually the lymphatic vessels that work with your blood vessels become overloaded adding to the swelling.

Research also shows that women who are overweight and obese after their surgery for breast cancer are significantly more likely to develop lymphoedema (a type of chronic oedema) than woman who are not overweight.

Will being overweight or obese affect chronic oedema management?

The management (treatment) of chronic oedema may be seriously hampered if you are overweight and obese. This is because:

- It is more difficult to keep bandages or compression garments in place. If you are overweight they can slide and move.
- It is more difficult to find compression hosiery that will fit well.
- Exercise is an important part of chronic oedema management and experience suggests that overweight and obese people find exercise or physical activity more difficult.


How can I achieve and maintain a healthy weight?

- Go to your general practice or health centre for advice from your family doctor and discuss a healthy weight goal to work towards.
- Ask for a referral to a dietitian.
- Ask for advice at your surgery about exercise and getting active. You may be able to be referred for free exercise activities such as swimming or use of an approved gym.
- Do the exercises recommended by the chronic oedema team.
- Research suggests that keeping a diary or log of what you eat and how much you exercise helps improve success rates for a healthier life style; bring this to your appointments with the chronic oedema team so that we can help and support.
- Keep a monthly record of your waist measurements.
- Any weight loss can be beneficial.



For more information please

Call: 01803 210800 Or visit: www.rowcrofthospice.org.uk



If you require this information in
an alternative format
please call 01803 210844

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You may find the following websites useful:

Blog by a lymphoedema specialist with research based information:
www.lymphedemablog.com/2010/12/03/obesity-and-lymphedema/

Healthy lifestyles help for people in Teignbridge:
www.newtonabbotpeople.co.uk/news/Healthy-lifestyle-advice-Teignbridge-people/story-10645155-detail/story.html

You can also telephone 01626 357010.

Healthy lifestyles services in Torbay:
www.torbaycaretrust.nhs.uk/yourlife/healthy_lifestyles/

You can also telephone: 01803 208840.

Information about healthy living:
www.nhs.uk/Change4Life/

Overweight and Obesity Fact Sheet 13 by the World Health
Organization. www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs311/en/

The ageuk website provides advice for older people about health,
including diet and exercise: www.ageuk.org.uk/health-wellbeing/
You can also telephone: 0800 169 6565.

This NHS site can help you work out whether or not you are
overweight; it has other health related useful information:
www.nhs.uk/tools/pages/healthyweightcalculator.aspx

While this website is aimed at people living in Sussex, it contains
useful information about healthy living:
www.activelifestyle.me/health-and-food/facts-and-figures

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