

# Compression Bandaging

## Treatment protocols for lymphedema management

By Martina Reddick

**Q Why is it so important to apply compression bandaging after Manual Lymphatic Drainage sessions?**

**A** In the treatment of lymphedema, compression bandaging is the application of short stretch bandages used to increase tissue pressure in the swollen extremity. It improves the efficiency of the muscle and joint pump and prevents re-accumulation of lymphatic fluid. In the intensive phase of treatment, compression bandaging is the main component that helps the swelling reduce and remain so. Compression bandaging also helps break up deposits of accumulated scar and connective tissue.

Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD) is a gentle hands-on manual therapy where the therapist effectively redirects the lymphatic fluid from an affected area of the body into an unaffected area, thereby improving lymph drainage. In combination with Complete Decongestive Therapy (CDT), the effects of MLD are prolonged and continually restore the limb to a more normal shape and function.

MLD alone is not sufficient treatment for lymphedema in the intensive phase. If it is the only component of treatment offered, the results will be temporary and the lasting effect of removing lymph fluid from the swollen limb is not possible. It must be combined with compression to maintain the effects of the MLD.



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**Q Why do some CDT therapists apply compression bandaging as part of the CDT session and others do not?**

**A** Not applying compression bandaging is sometimes a clinical decision made by the therapist that may be due to the therapist having insufficient training in CDT or due to time constraints in their clinic. Research shows that, of the four elements of CDT, the compression component has the largest effect on edema reduction. Therefore, the intensive phase should always include compression bandaging. The only circumstances for not applying compression bandaging are if a patient does not tolerate compression or if it is contraindicated. In these situations MLD alone may be their only option.

**Q Is there a standard of treatment to expect?**

**A** When seeking treatment for lymphedema it is advisable to review the guidelines recently adopted by the Canadian Lymphedema Framework (CLF) with respect to training of therapists in lymphedema management using CDT. Those guidelines can be found on the CLF website. Complete Decongestive Therapy (CDT) is the commonly prescribed treatment of care for lymphedema in many countries. The components of care include MLD, compression bandaging, skin care, exercise and education in self-care. The International Lymphoedema Framework Best



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Practice Guidelines recommend a progressive approach to lymphedema care, given the staging, severity and presentation of lymphedema. The therapist and patient should set the treatment plan in accordance with the patient's goals and include some or all of the components above.

**Q What should a patient expect when visiting a certified lymphedema therapist?**

**A** Most importantly, on the initial visit, patients should have a detailed assessment as

the treatment plan is determined by the stage, severity and complexity of the lymphedema as well as the person's functional and psychological well-being. A discussion with the patient will determine the treatment plan which may include some or all of the components of CDT. It is important that the patient be aware of the rationale behind the treatment protocol. A holistic multidisciplinary approach provides better results. Successful management relies on both the therapist and patient having an active role in the treatment. **LE**

### HAVE QUESTIONS?

If you would like to have a question answered by an experienced lymphedema health professional, please contact us via email:

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Be sure to put "Ask The Expert" in your subject line.