



Coping with a cancer diagnosis and resulting treatment is an emotionally and physically difficult time for the patient and their family.

Most cancer sufferers can be helped by our therapists and here is one example of what you can expect.

Breast Cancer

Following the removal of lymph nodes and radiation therapy, Secondary Lymphoedema can affect breast cancer patients in the arm, chest and trunk. This causes additional pain, discomfort and anxiety but it can be successfully treated and managed with MLD. Symptoms of Secondary Lymphoedema can include:

- swelling, a feeling of fullness or heaviness
- tightness and stretching of the skin
- reduced movement of the joints
- thickening and dryness of the skin
- discomfort or pain

So, what is Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD)?

MLD is a very light, gentle, massage-like treatment on the bare skin and is used to control different types of lymphoedema/swelling in any part of the body due to an abnormal build-up of fluid in the tissues. MLD stimulates the lymphatic system which removes fluid and other waste products thereby reducing swelling and supporting the immune system.

The lymphatic system is also an important part of the body's defence against infection. It is made up of groups of lymph nodes or glands throughout the body, connected by a network of lymphatic vessels.

The therapist does not use oils or creams and does not normally wear gloves.



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 working lymphatic vessels. This stimulates them and helps move the fluid away from the swollen area so that it can drain away naturally.

The MLD treatment can be followed by bandaging or the fitting of compression garments to reduce limb size. The therapist will also discuss how to minimise the risk of infection 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 Phase One.

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 Lymphatic Drainage. The first visit to a certified MLD^{UK} practitioner will include a consultation during which the therapist will probably measure the affected area(s). After that, each session should 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.