

Lymphedema Bandaging for the Arm



Allina Health

**COURAGE KENNY
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Lymphedema

Lymphedema is the swelling of body tissue that can be caused by tissue damage or lymph node removal.

Using special types of bandages to apply pressure will help the fluid move better within the tissues.

How to Bandage Your Arm

1. Apply a low-pH moisturizing skin lotion (such as Eucerin® or Nivea®) to your arm.
2. Cut a hole for the thumb in the stockinette bandage. Pull it over the arm and up to the bottom of the armpit.



3. Wrapping the fingers: Start with a prefolded elastic gauze bandage. Make one circle around the wrist and then bring the bandage up to the nail bed of the thumb.

Using light tension, wrap the entire thumb in a circular direction, from the nail bed to the base. Make a circle around the wrist, and then move to the next finger from nail bed to base.



4. Wrap each finger individually. Start at the nail bed and make circular turns around each finger. Keep slight tension on the bandage. Secure the bandage at the wrist after each finger has been wrapped.



5. Start the cotton padding (10 cm wide) on the hand. Cover the entire hand and then move to the arm. To get a double layer of padding, let it overlap the previous turn by about 50 percent.



6. Cover the entire arm. Double or triple the padding for added protection on the inside of the elbow.



Note: To have more compression on the arm, your therapist may recommend that you place precut foam pieces to the hand, forearm and upper arm. This will be secured with a cream-colored bandage.

7. Start a compression bandage (6 cm wide) at the wrist. Make one complete circle around the wrist to secure the bandage.



Continue by bringing the bandage diagonally across the top of the hand toward the knuckles. Bring the bandage around the back to the wrist. Come back up to the top of the hand and make a circle around the base of the knuckles.



Return to the start and repeat these steps until the entire bandage is used. Be sure to end the bandage at the wrist.

Keep moderate tension on the bandage and cover all of the hand including the knuckles. Tape each bandage to secure it before applying the next one.

Note: Wrap the bandage around the hand 3 to 5 times to build up pressure. Keep your fingers spread apart and extended while wrapping the hand.

8. Start a second compression bandage (8 cm wide) again at the wrist and then cover the forearm. Each individual turn overlaps the previous one by 50 percent.

Note: Keep arm muscles tight by making a fist with the bandaged hand.



9. After reaching the elbow (elbow is slightly flexed) the bandage runs diagonally across the elbow crease, then once around the lower part of the upper arm and back down to the forearm.



10. The next compression bandage (10 cm wide) starts at the middle of the forearm. Cover the whole arm in a circular direction. Each individual turn overlaps the previous one by 50 percent. Keep moderate tension on the bandage and cover the rest of the arm. The bandage is then taped below the armpit. Be sure to apply enough tape to keep it in place.

Note: Your therapist may recommend more compression by adding a fourth layer of bandages around the arm.



How to Tell if the Bandages are Too Tight or Wrapped Wrong

If your bandages are too tight:

- you may have tingling
- you may have pain in your fingers or hand
- your fingers may become cold and turn blue.

If these symptoms do go away by moving your hand, remove your bandages and rewrap. If you wrap one area of your arm too tightly, fluid could pool below that point.

How Often Bandages Should Be Washed

Wash the bandages about every 2 to 4 days (when they look soiled or lack elasticity). Washing the bandages help make the fabric elastic again. Plan to rotate between two sets of bandages.

How To Wash the Bandages

Put the bandages in a mesh bag. Set your washer to the delicate or gentle cycle (in cold water). Do not use bleach or fabric softener. Use a mild detergent. Let the bandages air dry. Don't put the bandages in the dryer or hang them on an outdoor clothesline.

If you hang the bandages (inside), fold them in half so the weight of the water does not cause them to stretch as they dry. Don't wring or stretch the bandages while they are wet. Roll the bandages after they are dry (to make them easier to put on).

Lymphedema Guidelines

Lymphedema can develop right away after surgery or many years later. All people who have had lymph node surgery have the potential to develop lymphedema.

It is important that you know what symptoms to watch for during and after treatment. The sooner you recognize symptoms, the easier they will be to treat.

These guidelines have the most evidence-based proof:


- Early detection is extremely important to prevent severe swelling and problems using the affected area over time.
- You are more likely to get lymphedema if you are obese. Talk with your primary care provider about a healthy weight for you.
- You will be less likely to have swelling if you have more muscle mass in your arm or leg. Exercise to improve muscle mass is beneficial.

What to Watch for

- Check for early symptoms of lymphedema:
 - changes to your skin
 - skin feels sore or tight
 - your arm or leg feels heavy
 - you have a cut or burn that does not heal
 - your clothing feels tighter
 - your rings, shirts, pants or socks do not fit as well.
- The standard practice is to avoid blood pressure checks, infusions, injections and blood draws in your affected arm.
 - There may be times where it may be better for you to have a blood pressure or a blood draw in the affected arm. This will depend on how urgent it is for the procedure.
 - You should tell all members of your health care team that you have had a lymph node biopsy or removal and are at risk for lymphedema.

Check Your Skin

Get in the habit of checking your skin for signs of increased swelling, or tight or thickened tissue. Look at your skin creases to see if they are thicker.



Do this often. Symptoms do not usually show up and go away. Usually, when lymphedema is starting, symptoms will slowly get worse over time.

Whom to Call

- Call your health care provider **right away** if you have:
 - **rapid, severe swelling**
 - redness, warmth or tenderness in the affected area
 - blisters or rash
 - chills
 - fever
 - questions or concerns for infection.
- For specific information on your own medical history and risk of developing lymphedema, make an appointment to see a cancer rehabilitation specialist. (These doctors are experts in managing and treating lymphedema.)
 - You do not need a referral to schedule this appointment.
 - Call 612-863-2123 to make an appointment.







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