

## Patient information

# Oedema management for hand and wrist

Oedema (swelling) is a natural part of the healing process that occurs after every injury and surgical procedure. It is important to reduce this swelling where possible as it can restrict your joint mobility, resulting in stiffness and decreased range of movement in your fingers or wrist. Swelling can take several months to settle down, particularly if the joint is immobilised for a period of time.

### How to reduce oedema

#### 1. Elevation

Keep the hand elevated as much as possible, ideally above the level of your heart. This will allow gravity to help drain the swelling away. This can be done by propping the limb on a pillow or cushion whilst you are sitting/sleeping and holding it up in an elevated position whilst moving around. Try to avoid relying on a sling for long periods of time as this can lead to stiffness in your upper limb.

#### 2. Contrast baths

This works to encourage a pumping action in the capillaries of the hand to pump the swelling out. Place two bowls of water in front of you, one with icy cold water and one with warm water. Soak the hand in the cold water for one minute or as long as it is comfortable making a fist and releasing. Then repeat the same in the warm water for three minutes. Repeat this for 10 minutes finishing in the warm water. This is not suitable if you have open wounds on your hand or upper limb or have problems with your circulation.

#### 3. Massage

Position your hand above the level of your heart, resting the elbow on a firm surface. To complete the massage use firm downward strokes working from the

fingertip past the elbow working to squeeze the swelling out of your hand. Use cream to aid the massage. Complete for 10 minutes at least twice a day.

#### 4. **Movement**

Movement in the hand causing contraction / relaxation of the muscles works to encourage a natural pumping action which will decrease the swelling. This can be achieved by making a fist and straightening the fingers repetitively. Your therapist will advise what movements you can perform.

#### 5. **Compression**

A compression bandage / glove can be used to reduce the swelling in your hand. A self-adherent elasticated wrap, called Coban Wrap, is intended to provide compression in order to reduce swelling. The elastic wrap contains a material that makes it stick to itself but not to other materials or skin.

### **Directions for use of Coban Wrap**

Leaving the tip free, start at the end of the finger or thumb and wind the Coban Wrap round the digit in a spiral fashion, down the finger towards the hand until you reach the base of the finger. The wrap needs to be stretched to about half its capacity should be covered and the wrap should be spaced out evenly.



Your Coban Wrap can be re-applied many times, however if it becomes dirty or loses its elasticity you will need to replace it. It should not be washed.

### **Precautions**

- Check your finger regularly for any signs of inflammation, discolouration or circulation problems (the fingertip turning bright red or white and cold compared to your other finger tips)
- Do not apply Coban Wrap to an open wound
- Do not wear at night
- Stop using the Coban Wrap if you experience a change in colour of the skin, throbbing, numbness, pins and needles, further swelling or an allergic reaction

**Wearing times for Coban Wrap** .....

Treatment recommended .....

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Frequency .....

Therapist .....

Telephone number .....

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