

Low Level Light Therapy (LLLT, laser therapy) for Lymphoedema Patients

Other formats

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Laser therapy has not been researched extensively yet, but some small studies have found that it can help reduce the volume of the arm, break down scar and thickened tissue and increase range of motion while reducing tightness. Research shows that the laser light increases the flow of lymph, reduces the amount of excess protein and tissue in the fluid and reduces the ability of scar tissue to “stick” to the underlying healthy tissue.

How does it work?

The laser targets individual cells that are not working correctly and re-energises them to work more effectively. This helps to reduce fibrous tissue and promote uptake into the lymphatics meaning that the swelling becomes softer and there may be a reduction in limb volume.

What happens during treatment?

The lymphoedema therapist will place the device directly onto your skin.

Several areas of the skin will usually be treated for approximately 1 minute each with a varying treatment time ranging between 10 – 30 minutes.

What will it feel like?

Laser therapy does not hurt and most people do not feel anything. Some people have reported a slight warmth or tingling feeling.

How long does it take to work?

Research shows that the benefits are most often felt 3 months after beginning treatment. However, you may notice an immediate effect after the first treatment. More commonly people report a gradual improvement over 1 – 6 weeks, with many seeing improvement by day 4 or week 2 of treatment, and this improvement should continue.

This is what the device looks like



Does it work well with other treatments?

Yes. Laser therapy works well in conjunction with other aspects of care such as compression, Intermittent Pneumatic Compression (IPC) and Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD).

Does laser therapy work for everyone?

It does not work for some people. Your therapist will evaluate your treatment response and stop it if there is no improvement.

Caution

As with other lymphoedema treatments it's never a good idea to try to use a laser therapy device on your own. There are low-level laser devices available online and marketed directly to consumers. However, attempting to use them on your own could make your lymphoedema worse. Only work with a lymphoedema therapist who has been trained in using low-level laser therapy as part of the overall treatment plan.

Further information

North Devon Lymphoedema Service Tel: 01271 341551

Breast Cancer Care – www.breastcancercare.org.uk

British Lymphology Society – www.lymphoedema.org/bls

Lymphoedema Support Network – www.lymphoedema.org/lsn

Macmillan Cancer Relief – www.macmillan.org.uk

NHS Choices – www.nhs.uk/conditions/lymphoedema

References:

Treatments for lymphoedema(2015) Available at: www.breastcancercare.org.uk/information-support/facing-breast-cancer/going-through-treatment-breast-cancer/side-effects/lymphoedema/treatments-lymphoedema (Accessed: 9 June 2016).

Other ways of managing lymphoedema (2016) - information and support - Macmillan cancer support. Available at: www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/side-effects-and-symptoms/lymphoedema/other-ways-managing-lymphoedema.html#tcm:9-3704 (Accessed: 9 June 2016).

Use and response to treatment using low level laser therapy (2009) Available at: www.hadhealth.com/pdf/casestudies/73-76%20Wigg%20laser.pdf (Accessed: 9 June 2016).

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email ndht.pals@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at www.careopinion.org.uk.

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