



## Manual Oedema Massage (1 of 2)

Manual Oedema Massage (MEM) is a technique to help reduce swelling after injury or surgery. Swelling is often referred to as oedema (and spelt 'edema' in American terminology). The technique aims to open up the lymphatic system so that the excess oedema can clear. The lymphatic system is the body's way of managing waste products from normal cellular activity.

After injury or surgery the lymphatic system can become overloaded with excess fluid and parts of it can become blocked. MEM is a way of clearing these blockages, starting at the trunk and working out towards the affected limb.

Before starting any home programme your therapist will teach you all of the techniques you need to learn and will explain the technical terms.

MEM is not suitable for everybody and so you should not use it without guidance from your therapist.

### Home programme

In order to be effective, the following home programme should be completed at least every morning and evening. Every hour you should also complete one of the exercises below (of your choice) to keep the lymphatic system activated. For example, doing some of the breathing exercises, a sweep session or elbow node semi-circles etc.

- 5 x deep diaphragmatic breathing
- Cardiovascular exercises - for around a minute, such as marching on the spot, punching your hands up into the air or star jumps
- 20 x underarm semi circles on each arm, starting on your unaffected side first, then moving to your affected arm.
- 20 x sweeps from the tips of your fingers up your affected arm and across your chest towards your unaffected side.



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The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: [patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk) if you would like a reference list.

- 20 x elbow nodes semi circles
- 20 x sweeps as before



- Upper limb exercises for a minute or so such as “chicken wings”, punching up into the air, shoulder curls, elbow bending etc.
- 20 x mid forearm semi circles (your therapist will tell you whether this should be done on the back or palmar side of your forearm depending on where your swelling is situated).
- 20 x sweep both from the palmar side and back of your hand up your arm and across your chest towards your unaffected side.
- Above head exercises such as stretching up, punching up to the sky etc - for a minute or so.
- Finish with the usual hand exercises that you have been doing in hand therapy.



## Do's and don'ts

- When completing MEM you should use very light pressure (as if stroking a pet cat). Excessive pressure will simply compress the lymphatic channels and stop the fluid being able to flow through them effectively.
- If you experience any discomfort or become unwell whilst using this technique, stop the exercises and consult your therapist for advice.
- If you develop a cold or ‘flu, MEM may make your cold symptoms feel worse so you may wish to stop MEM until your symptoms subside.
- If you develop an infection in your injured limb or any other part of your body stop the exercises and consult your therapist for advice.