

## **A Hand Saves A Leg**

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Ah, the magic of the hand! How our society underestimates the power we have in our hands and fingertips. When a practitioner is properly trained and the techniques effectively applied, Lymph Drainage Therapy can save a limb, improve a life and change a lifetime.

The following case illustrates how lymphatic drainage can make a profound difference in an individual's quality of life.

### **Patient History**

Ellen\*, now 26 years old, has had primary lymphedema of the right leg since the age of 11. As she matured, her leg progressively increased in size because of repeated bouts of cellulitis. In 2001 and 2002 she was having cellulitis every other month and was becoming progressively more incapacitated, until she could no longer attend college and could not walk long distances.

A lymphoscintigraphy demonstrated blockages in the area of the popliteal and pelvic lymph nodes. There were very scant vessels through the right leg and dilated lymph vessels. The valves were incompetent, resulting in backflow of the lymphatic fluid.

### **Physical Appearance**

Ellen's right leg was very edematous, with the majority of the edema between the knee and the foot. The skin was taut with the pores distended and lymph fluid leaking. The calf was hard and fibrotic and extended out so far that it looked like a shelf. There were multiple folds over the foot that hung to the floor so that the ankle was not evident.

### **Therapeutic Approach**

Initially, 30 Lymph Drainage Therapy sessions were scheduled. After further evaluation and palpation of the tissues, it became evident that more treatments were needed. For three weeks therapy was conducted every day, then reduced to three times a week. After 55 treatments, therapy was scheduled two times a week with emphasis on self-massage, self-bandaging, skin care, home care and prevention of infections. A total of 60 treatments were given.

### **Bandaging Sequence**

The skin was treated with Aquaphor to reduce the risk of infection under the bandages. All the folds were padded with Artiflex. A stockinette was placed on the leg. A chip mat was used around the ring of the ankle and a "Chocolate Bar" behind the calf to begin to soften the fibrotic tissues. Multiple layers of Rosidal Soft were used for added compression. Ellen stood as the rest of the bandages were applied.

As the folds on the bottom softened and emptied, the problem became lifting the folds so they didn't touch the floor. We used the Solaris Crescent that we covered with Artiflex to prevent the edges from cutting into the tender skin. The lower fold was then wrapped using 6-inch gauze to hold the crescent in place and to provide shape to the softening tissues.

It became easier to bandage Ellen on her stomach, as the folds fell backward and were easier to wrap. The stockinette was put on and more foam padding was used to contain the folds. The foam was held in place by a piece of Comperm G from the foot to below the knee, and then the leg was wrapped with Rosidal Soft.

A 10cm x 10m short-stretch bandage for the ankle was started at an angle to provide suspension for the softening folds. To keep the folds from pulling the bandage down, AC tape was used on top of the bandage to pull up. This proved very helpful in allowing Ellen to put on her shoe. Otherwise, the bandage would come too low and drape to the floor.

Another 10cm x 10m bandage was added, then Ellen stood up. The area behind her knee was very well padded. A 12cm x 10m short-stretch bandage was used from the ankle to below the knee, two additional 10 x 10s were used, and then we were finished. The bandages remained in place without slippage until the next treatment. Ellen was able to walk and, as the limb reduced, also ride a stationary bicycle.

Ellen's leg, as well as her weight, reduced exceptionally well. In a few more months, the skin folds will hopefully reabsorb and her leg will continue to reduce. Ellen has left for her country again, excited that she can now return to college and spreading the word about how Lymph Drainage Therapy saved her leg and changed her life.