

# Dietary Suggestions which may help you better control lower Limb Lipoedema

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## INTRODUCTION

### What is Lipoedema?

Lipoedema is a heritable problem of fat deposition and metabolism, associated with a poorly formed micro lymphatic and vascular system whose end result is the accumulation of excessive amounts of subcutaneous fat in the lower legs. Characteristics of it are; it's generally painful, affects both legs, and the area bruises easily. Generally the condition does not affect the feet. As Lipoedema progresses it may reduce lymphatic transport from the limb and result in fluid accumulation. This is described as Lipo-Lymphoedema.

### Management

Specific treatment (ie what the health professional may do) or management strategies (ie what you and your partner or carer can do) will be suggested to you by your Doctor/Health professional, following your full assessment at a Lymphoedema Assessment Clinic.

These treatments or management strategies may include laser therapy, the use of support garments, lymphatic drainage, massage, stress management, specific mobility exercises, and mild exercise programs (e.g. Walking, gentle bike riding, or water based exercises like swimming), weight loss (if overweight), and dietary adjustments e.g. Reducing the long chain fatty acids in your diet. One of the more important exercise programs is that involving breathing and gentle leg and foot movements. Please ensure you have been given one of these sheets

You may also be advised to monitor your limb measurements daily and/or weekly and record changes. As you progress with your treatments, one of the first signs is generally that your limb/s feel better or is 'less heavy or tense', then a little later, the tissues should feel softer, and eventually the limb may get smaller.

The remainder of this sheet will focus on diet management.

## DIETARY (AND LIFESTYLE) MANAGEMENT

***We recommend you do not attempt this diet without the advice of a Dietitian.***

***The information that follows below should be used in conjunction with an individualised dietary program devised by a dietitian, following a full dietary assessment.***

***Please note that your Dietitian may need to combine other dietary restrictions/recommendations, with the advice that is in this diet sheet, based on your medical/nutritional requirements (eg if you have diabetes, elevated cholesterol levels, or are overweight).***

### **When (and why) is dietary assistance required?**

Dietary intervention is often necessary if you have been diagnosed with Lipoedema or Lympho-Lipoedema. In addition, if you are also overweight, and that is adding to your lymphatic drainage problem, then dietary assistance is also required in terms of calorie intake.

In some of the middle and late stages of Lymphoedema and in Lipoedemas and when you are overweight, there are accumulations of fatty tissues below the skin (but above the muscle) which can reduce the working of the lymphatic system and so a vicious cycle of poor lymphatic drainage and further fat deposits may begin.

### **Goals of dietary management**

**The goals of dietary management are to aim to:**

- 1) Consume a balanced, low fat, low sugar, low salt, high fibre, and high fluid intake diet
- 2) Reduce the load on the lymphatic system (especially that from the intestines).
- 3) Improve the functioning of the lymphatic system. (especially that from the legs)

### **Strategies to reduce the load on (and improve) the function of the Lymphatic System**

**The load on the Lymphatic System can be reduced by:**

#### **1) Weight loss (if overweight).**

This may help reduce the external pressure on the delicate lymph collecting and transport vessels, allowing them to pump better. It will also mean less tissue from which the lymph fluids have to drain.

#### **2) Reducing dietary fat intake (particularly Long Chain Fatty Acids) (LCFA)**

This is because after LCFA have to be absorbed from the intestine by the lymphatic system. This increased load may mean lymph from other areas (usually the lower limbs) cannot drain away as well or that occasionally lymph fluid from the intestine finds its way in a reverse direction down into the limbs.

In some cases your Dietitian may advise you to substitute your fats with food high in Medium Chain Fatty Acids (MCFA). This is because MCFA (and SCFA (Short Chain Fatty Acids)) can be absorbed from the intestine by the blood vessels, and so do not put additional load on your lymphatic system.

If you would like more information on these fatty acids please ask for an additional sheet.

### **How do I reduce LCFA in my diet?**

**A) Avoid (or keep to a minimum) foods high in LCFA (greater than 12 carbon in length)**

- Avoid fatty meats, fatty chicken and turkey, and chicken skin.  
*Aim to choose small serves of the leanest cuts of meat, skinless chicken or turkey breast. Choose very lean alternative game meats such as kangaroo.*
- Avoid (or limit) fatty fish such as salmon, deep sea fish, sardines, and mackerel.  
*Instead choose non fatty fish such as tuna, whiting, garfish and some shellfish.*
- Avoid (or limit) cow and goat milk (full fat), cheese and yoghurt (full fat).  
*Instead choose non fat, or very low fat dairy products, in moderate amounts, or calcium fortified rice or oat milk.*
- Avoid (or limit) full fat soy and soy products (full fat), eggs, avocado.  
*Instead choose very low fat soy milk, and other very low fat soy products, in moderate amounts.*
- Avoid (or limit) all oils (except coconut oil), and butter, nuts and seeds.
- Avoid (or limit) foods that may contain large amounts of oil or butter eg fried & snack foods, crisps, creamy sauces, some takeaways eg fried fish & chips, cakes, biscuits, chocolates.
- *Choose cooking methods that aim to drain away as much fat as possible eg grilling, baking on a rack or BBQ.*

***Your Dietitian will give you further information on specific quantities required, and your limitations, from this group, depending on your needs.***

***Please note: Your Dietitian will probably restrict your intake of coconut oil, as this is still a high fat food, even though it is low in LCFA's.***

***It is particularly important that you keep all fats low, including coconut fat, if you have elevated lipid or cholesterol levels, are overweight, have diabetes or any other medical condition that requires you to have a low fat diet.***

## **B) Have moderate size serves of foods low in LCFA**

- Choose very low fat dairy or soy products e.g. .1% fat cows milk (e.g. Shape), non fat soy milk, low fat yoghurt (e.g. Nestle diet lite), very low fat cheese e.g. devondale 7% fat cheese, Kraft Extra Lite® or Bega Super slim® slices (both have 10% fat).
- Alternatively, or in addition, consider using rice or oat milk instead (or as well as), non fat (or skim) cows milk or very low fat soy milk. Note: Rice milk is available as an option in the UHT milk selection, in most supermarkets.

## **C) Have moderate to large size serves of foods with no or very minimal LCFA**

- *Breads* (but limit soy breads and breads with added seeds), *cereals* (but limit cereals with added nuts/seeds), *pasta and rice*)
- *Fruit*
- *Vegetables*
- *Legumes e.g. dried lentils, red kidney beans, split peas, chick peas.*  
*\*\*Use more of these foods in place of meats and chicken (or in addition to small serves of meat or chicken) to form the base of your main meal in curries, stews, soups or casseroles.*

*\*\*Aim to have at least two vegetarian meals per week to assist in decreasing your intake of LCFA.*

- *Egg whites. These can be used to make omelettes or frittatas in place of whole eggs as a base.*
- *Rice/ oat milk (fortified with calcium). Use in place of milk in drinks, custards and cooking.*

***\*\*Use in unlimited amounts (unless your Dietitian has recommended specific quantities due to other conditions/reasons e.g. weight loss or Diabetes)***

**D) Have small serves (if required) of foods high in MCFA (e.g. Use in cooking or food preparation, if required)**

- *Coconut oil*  
*\*This may be able to be purchased at your local supermarket or health food shop If you are unable to locate this, contact your local asian grocer.*
- *Coconut milk. Light Coconut Milk*
- *Coconut (designated or whole)*

***\*\*Specific quantities of these fats listed above, will be advised by your Dietitian, and will be dependent upon your specific needs.***

***\*\*Use only minimal amounts of these fats if you are trying to reduce your weight, or if you have elevated lipid or cholesterol levels, or diabetes, or if you are following a low fat diet.. Your Dietitian will take these, and your other needs into account, when determining your specific requirements.***

## **Cooking Tips**

- If you are attempting to reduce your weight, are diabetic, or have raised blood cholesterol or lipid levels or if you are trying to follow a low fat diet, use skim evaporated milk sweetened with coconut essence (this is the lowest fat option) or use low fat (or Lite) coconut milk instead of full fat coconut milk. Also use low fat cooking methods e.g. grill meat rather than frying, or wrap in alfoil or bake on a rack, roast, or use a barbeque with a grill plate, or a nonstick cooking spray.
- If you are using coconut oil, keep the use of it to a minimum by using a spray or wiping the cooking pan with a pastry brush (Note: To reduce your intake even further, brush the oil onto the meat, not the pan). You can purchase a spray bottle to add your coconut oil to, providing a thin and even method of distribution for covering baking and cooking utensils.
- Keep your salt intake to a minimum by not adding salt to your food and choosing no (or low) salt (or sodium) packaged or processed foods, where possible.

## **Summary**

Your Dietitian will devise a nutritionally balanced, low fat, individualized dietary program and write up daily menu options, giving you choices and quantities of specific foods, taking into account your medical condition(s), symptoms, food preferences and usual daily eating routine.

If you need to lose weight, a weight loss program will also be discussed with you.

If you have Hypertension (with or without associated fluid retention), as well as Lipoedema, then the Dietitian will discuss further with you more dietary strategies to further reduce your salt intake, and increase your fluid intake. However, you must speak with your Dr about high blood pressure management and if you think it may not be working.

You should also monitor and show your specific symptoms of Lipoedema to your Doctor/Dietitian, by recording them together with records of your food intake.

If may be necessary to take supplements whilst following this diet. Discuss this with your Dietitian.

You also need to be aware of the potential effects of abdominal bloating (caused by gas accumulation in the intestine) and constipation on the flow of lymph through the abdominal area and have these matters addressed also by your dietician.

Another important but often forgotten factor is your breathing. Ask for a sheet on how to better manage breathing to help improve lymph flow

Please ask us for a list of dieticians near you if you are having trouble finding one.

*Caron Milham & Associates (Dietitians) can assist in devising for you an individualized dietary program, and daily menu plans, based upon your needs.*

*Please phone **(08) 8178 0399** to make an appointment at one of their Clinics. Or alternatively, visit their website [www.milhamdietitians.com](http://www.milhamdietitians.com)*

*If you live outside South Australia, please also feel free to contact them, as they now have available a 'Correspondence Counseling Program' to assist you, where you can access dietary services from the comfort of your own home.*