

Policy for the use of Liposuction for Lymphoedema

Category: Restricted

Liposuction

Liposuction is an operation which involves a suction technique to remove fat from certain areas of the body which haven't responded to exercise and diet. As liposuction is normally seen as a cosmetic procedure, it is not normally available through the NHS. However, liposuction can sometimes be used by the NHS to treat certain health conditions.

Section A: Liposuction in Lymphoedema

Lymphoedema

Lymphoedema is a long-term (chronic) condition that causes swelling in the body's tissues. It can affect any part of the body; however, it usually develops in the arms or legs when the lymphatic system doesn't work properly.

The lymphatic system

The lymphatic system is part of the immune system. It is made up of a network of tissues, organs and glands throughout the body which help to transport 'lymph', an infection fighting fluid around the body. It also helps to remove excess fluid and fats from our bodies. When it doesn't work properly, it can cause swelling and encourage body fat to grow.

Treatment

Conservative treatment for lymphoedema is the first choice and the patient should be referred to a specialist lymphoedema service for assessment.

Current conservative treatments for lymphoedema include manual lymph drainage (MLD), which stimulates the movement of lymph away from the affected limb and decongestive lymphatic therapy (DLT). DLT combines MLD massage techniques with compressive bandaging, skin care and decongestive exercises. Once DLT sessions are stopped the patient is fitted with a custom-made compression garment, which is worn every day.

Patient selection should only be done by a specialist lymphoedema multidisciplinary team as part of a lymphoedema service pathway.

If conservative treatment fails, surgery may be used to treat lymphoedema by inserting a thin tube through small cuts in the skin to draw fat out from the affected limbs to help reduce limb size.

Eligibility Criteria

Patients with lymphoedema will be considered for funding for liposuction if they have not responded to standard treatments of lymphoedema:

- Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD), which stimulates the movement of lymph away from the affected limb.

AND

- Decongestive Lymphatic Therapy (DLT). DLT combines MLD massage techniques with compressive bandaging, skin care and decongestive exercises. Once DLT sessions are stopped the patient is fitted with a custom-made compression garment, which is worn every day.

AND

- Patient selection should only be done by a specialist lymphoedema multidisciplinary team as part of a lymphoedema service pathway.

This means the patient's NHS commissioning organisation (CCG), who is responsible for buying healthcare services on behalf of patients, will **only** fund the treatment if an Individual Funding Request (IFR) application has shown exceptional clinical need and the CCG supports this.