

Policy for the use of Liposuction for Lipoedema

Category: Not Routinely Commissioned

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.

Lipoedema

Lipoedema is a long-term condition where an unusual build-up of fat in the legs, thighs and buttocks, and sometimes in the arms, occurs which makes them increase in size. The condition usually only affects women, although in rare cases it can also affect men.

Treatments

There's been little research into lipoedema, so there's some uncertainty about the best way to treat the condition.

If you have lipoedema it's important to avoid significant weight gain and obesity because putting on weight will make the fatty swelling worse.

Compression tights are helpful for some people because they support the fatty swelling and may reduce the pain.

Liposuction can be a surgical option for the removal of fat.

Treatments to prevent lipoedema

Non-surgical treatments can sometimes help improve pain and tenderness, prevent or reduce lymphoedema, and improve the shape of affected limbs – although they often have little effect on the fatty tissue.

Several different treatments are designed to improve the flow and drainage of fluid in your tissues, such as:

- compression therapy – wearing bandages or garments that squeeze the affected limbs
- exercise – usually low-impact exercises, such as swimming and cycling
- massage – techniques that help encourage the flow of fluid through your body

Treatments that don't work

Treatments used for some types of tissue swelling are generally unhelpful for lipoedema. Lipoedema doesn't respond to:

- raising the legs
- diuretics (tablets to get rid of excess fluid)
- dieting – this tends to result in a loss of fat from areas not affected by lipoedema, with little effect on the affected areas

Causes of lipoedema

The cause of lipoedema isn't known, but in some cases there's a family history of the condition. It seems likely that the genes you inherit from your parents play a role. Lipoedema tends to start at puberty or at other times of hormonal change, such as during pregnancy or the menopause, which suggests hormones may also have an influence. Although the accumulation of fat cells is often worse in obese people, lipoedema isn't caused by obesity and can affect people who are a healthy weight. It shouldn't be mistaken for obesity and dieting often makes little difference to the condition.

There is currently a lack of clinical evidence to support the use of liposuction in patients with lipoedema. There is a small amount of evidence which looks promising and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) will continue to review the clinical evidence to support this indication as it becomes available.

Eligibility Criteria

For patients with lipoedema, liposuction is Not Routinely Commissioned in these clinical circumstances due to a lack of evidence to support this intervention.

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