Compression garments are used to prevent fluid from accumulating. Lymphedema causes the skin of the involved limb to stretch. The elastic fibers of skin, no longer can return to their original tension therefore added external compression, a garment, is required to maintain the reduction achieved in the clinic.

Garments should be worn daily and replaced every 3-6 months depending upon the brand. The elastic fibers of the garment wear out with time and therefore replacing the garment every 3-6 months is important to prevent the lymph fluid from increasing. Do not sleep in any garment unless specifically instructed by your therapist.

Types of Garments
Your therapist will discuss with you which type of garment is appropriate to control your lymphedema. There are two types of garments:

a) Over the counter (ready to wear)
   This type of garment comes in general sizes; small, medium, large and extra large. If your lymphedema limb fits into the proper “range” of size then an over the counter garment will be recommended.

b) Custom fit garment
   This type of garment is appropriate when the circumferential measurement of the limb does not fit into a small, medium or large.

Determining the appropriate Compression Class or Gradient
In general, a Class II garment (pressure gradient approximately 30-40 mmHg) is recommended for lymphedema. However, depending upon the severity of the lymphedema, your therapist may recommend a Class 1 (20-30 mmHg), a Class II, Class III (30-40 mmHg for legs only), or Class IV (>40mmHg for legs only)
There are some contraindications to garments, such as arteriole disease or fragile skin. If you have diabetes, hypertension, or a smoking history, then a simple painless test, called an ankle-brachial index, may need to be performed to ensure there is sufficient blood flow to the legs.

Care of Garments
To endure proper compression, garments should be washed every day. Garments can be either hand-washed in warm-hot water or machine washed on a gentle cycle and then must lay flat while drying. Therefore 2 garments are recommended with each order. Do not use Woolite or add bleach when washing the garments.

Donning and Doffing Garments
Your therapist will instruct you in proper techniques when putting on the garment. In general, the garment should be turned inside out. Never pull or stretch the garment while putting it on or off. In some cases, if you are unable to independently put on the garment, a “stocking donner” can be purchased.