

How to Care for Short-Stretch Compression Bandages

Compression bandages (and compression garments – see below) used in the [management of lymphedema](#) should be properly washed on a regular basis, so skin cells and oils won't become trapped in the fibers of the bandages and damage the integrity of the textile. Compression bandages may be machine or hand washed; machine wash is generally the preferred method. Once the bandages go through the spin cycle they are easy to hang and will dry much faster.



Daily washing is recommended, especially if lotions or creams are being used. If the bandages are machine washed it is recommended to place the unrolled bandages in a mesh laundry bag in order to protect the fabric during the washing cycle (the gentle cycle should be utilized).

Bandages are best washed in warm water (between 108 – 140°F); if the bandages are very dirty, they may be boil-washed up to 203°F.

It is best to have more than one set of bandages – one to wear, one to wash. The sets should be applied alternately to allow the “build in” elasticity of the bandages to recover and to prolong their effectiveness.

Tips for hand washing procedures:

1. Start by filling a bowl, bucket, sink, or small tub with water.
2. The compression bandages should be dipped gently into the water to dampen.
3. Add a small amount of washing solution (see below).
4. Let the compression bandages soak for a few minutes.
5. For better cleaning, gently rub the fibers of the compression bandages together without stretching them excessively.
6. Then, empty the tub and refill with water – dip or rinse the clean compression bandages thoroughly to rid the bandages of residual salts and oils from perspiration.
7. Gently squeeze the compression bandages to remove excess water.

8. Refer to the drying options below

Washing solutions

Harsh cleaning agents, solvents, petroleum-based cleaners etc. can destroy the thin fibers of compression bandages. Mild soaps or detergents should be used, free of bleach, chlorine, fabric softeners or other laundry additives.

Some compression garment manufacturers offer garment washing solutions, which are formulated to remove oil, body acids, and skin salts quickly and easily without damage to the fabric; using these specially-designed solutions is also recommended for compression bandages and will help extending their life span and keep them firm.

Drying

Compression bandages should be air dried. If using a dryer, the dial should be set on a no-heat (maximum low-heat) air drying cycle because excessive heat exposure may weaken or even damage the textile of the bandages.



When bandages are air-dried, it is important not to pull, squeeze or wring out the residual water from the material excessively. Rolling up the compression bandages in a towel and gently squeezing the towel before laying them out to dry, speeds up the drying process; bandages should never be left rolled up in a towel.

Whether bandages are line-dried, or laid flat to dry, exposure to direct sunlight should be avoided. It is recommended to place a towel on a drying rack and lay the bandages on top to dry. If hanging the bandages directly on a rack or pole to drip dry, the weight of the water could stretch the material.

Can compression bandages be ironed?

No, ironing is not necessary or recommended. When the bandages are removed from the wash, they should be hanged so they are flat and not twisted. Once they are dry, they should be tightly rolled for storage and future application.

When should a short-stretch compression bandage be replaced?

According to the manufacturer, bandages may be washed up to 50 times without losing their elasticity. While proper care will increase the lifespan of short-stretch bandages, they will need to be replaced about every six months, or when the bandages lose their “stiffness” and recoil.

What about the care of other materials used for the application of a padded short-stretch compression bandage?

Padding bandages (Artiflex, Cellona, foam rolls) and gauze bandages have much shorter use. Padding bandages lay much closer to the skin and tend to collect oils, body acids, and skin salts. The “fresher” the padding bandages, the softer and more cushion they provide. The same principles apply to gauze bandages (for finger and toe wrapping). Once gauze begins to loose its shape, and becomes soiled, it is time to toss them and use a fresh roll.



Stockinettes or tubular bandages (used directly on the skin as an underlay between the skin and bandage materials) can be washed. They will fray after a couple washes and loose their shape. Tubular bandages can be purchased in rolls and is a good idea to use a fresh layer every couple uses.

Follow the link for [Washing guidelines for compression garments](#)

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