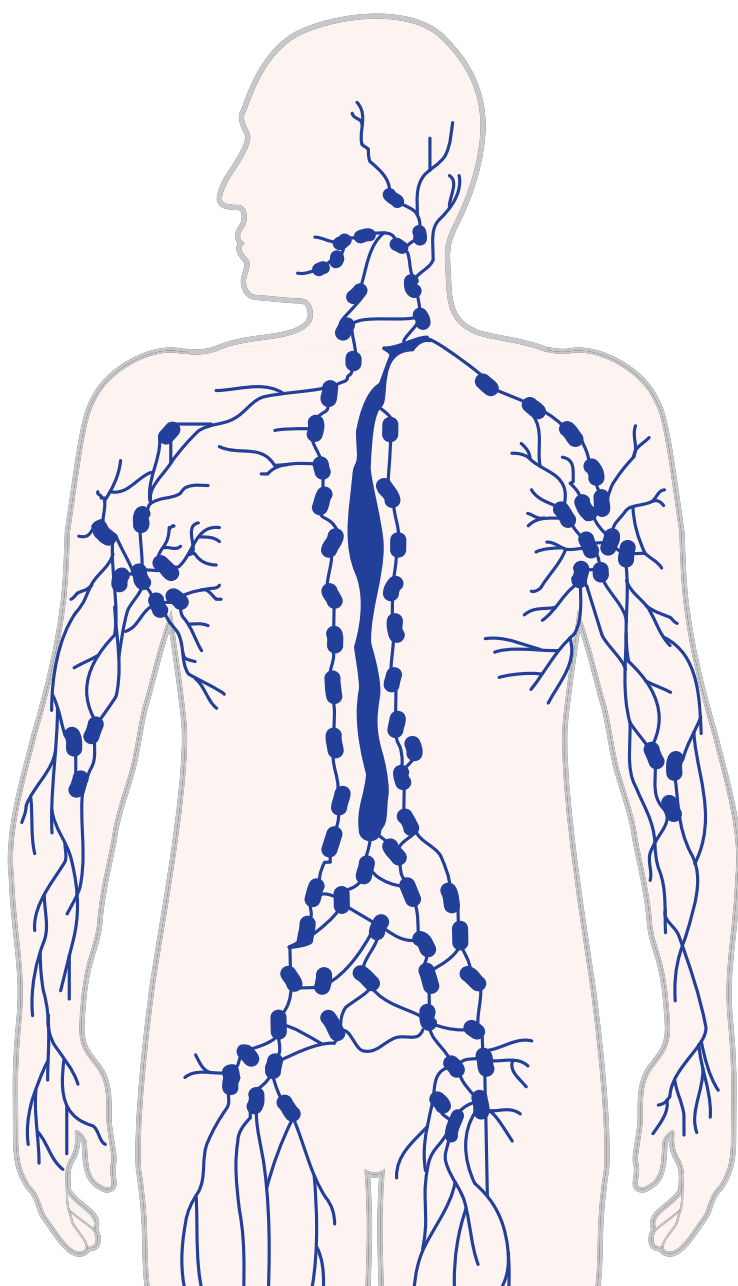




# Lymphatic malformations

This information sheet is about lymphatic malformations, what causes them and how they can be treated. It also outlines what you can expect when your child comes to Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) for assessment and treatment.



## What is a lymphatic malformation?

A lymphatic malformation is an abnormality of the lymphatic system.

The lymphatic system forms part of the immune system that identifies and fights off invaders, such as bacteria and viruses consisting of a network of vessels within the body through which lymph circulates, and many lymph nodes which filter the lymph fluid and help the body fight infection.

## What does a lymphatic malformation look like?

A lymphatic malformation may appear as a lump just under the skin anywhere in the body. Superficial lymphatic malformations can look like small bubbles under the skin. Some lymphatic malformations are not visible on the surface of the body.

## How is it diagnosed?

Diagnostic tests such as scans may be required to confirm the diagnosis and also to understand the extent of the lymphatic malformation.

## What causes lymphatic malformations?

A lymphatic malformation occurs when the lymph vessels fail to form correctly during the first few weeks of pregnancy.

## Can they be prevented?

No, as they occur so early in pregnancy, they cannot be prevented. However, the effects of the lymphatic malformation can be reduced or prevented. Lymphatic malformations may swell and become tender or painful when the body is fighting an infection. Infections should be identified and treated promptly.

## When might a lymphatic malformation need treatment?

Lymphatic malformations may require treatment if they are likely to interfere with function, for example, with breathing or feeding.

### Recurrent infections

If a child develops infections within the malformation frequently and they are not controlled by antibiotics, other options for treatment using sclerotherapy or surgery may be considered.

### How can lymphatic malformations be treated?

There are two main options for treatment: sclerotherapy and surgical removal.

### Sclerotherapy

This is a procedure carried out by an interventional radiologist, who shrinks the lymphatic vessels by injecting a special substance through the skin under general anaesthetic. It may require several sclerotherapy sessions and even then, it might grow again. For more information about sclerotherapy, please see our leaflet.

### Surgical removal

Sometimes, lymphatic malformations can be removed safely. Detailed scans will be needed to plan the operation. There will be a certain amount of scarring after the operation, as with all surgery.

## What is the outlook for children with a lymphatic malformation?

Like the options available for treatment, this depends on the size and location of the malformation. Many children who have been treated at GOSH are now leading fulfilling lives, attending college and working. Some young people require ongoing care so will need to transfer to adult services between the ages of 16 and 18 years. For more information about this transition process, please see our information sheet.

## Where to get further information

At Great Ormond Street Hospital

### Birthmark Unit

Great Ormond Street Hospital  
London WC1N 3JH  
Tel: 020 7405 9200 ext 1113

### Birthmark Support Group

BM The Birthmark Support Group  
London, WC1N 3XX  
Tel: 07825 855 888  
Email: [info@birthmarksupportgroup.org.uk](mailto:info@birthmarksupportgroup.org.uk)  
Website: [www.birthmarksupportgroup.org.uk](http://www.birthmarksupportgroup.org.uk)

### Changing Faces

The Squire Centre  
33-37 University Street  
London WC1E 6JN  
Tel: 0845 4500 275  
Email: [info@changingfaces.co.uk](mailto:info@changingfaces.co.uk)  
Website: [www.changingfaces.co.uk](http://www.changingfaces.co.uk)