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## Kinesio Taping

### Important Notice

*Although Kinesio tape, and books about how to use it, are widely available, experimenting with its use in treating your lymphedema is not a do-it-yourself activity.*

There are specific reasons as to why, how, and where tape is placed. You need supervision in the use of this tape. However after receiving instruction from a trained lymphedema therapist, a family member, friend, or caregiver can apply the kinesio tape by following the therapist's instructions.

### Introduction

Kinesio Taping is increasingly being recognized as a promising adjunct for the treatment lymphedema; however it is important that this treatment technique be applied only by lymphedema therapists trained this in treatment modality as it applies to lymphatic disorders.

### The Origins

The original *Kinesio Tex Tape*® and *Kinesio Taping Method*® were developed by Dr. Kenzo Kase a Japanese Chiropractor who trained in the United States. He initiated the concept in the early 1970's, and worked to develop a specialized tape that could aid the body in healing itself. The [Kinesio Taping Association](#) website has a brief video on their homepage that explains the history, features, and applications of this tape and technique.

Originally Kinesio Taping® was used only as a specialized elastic sports tape. Now additional tape products and techniques have emerged so that this product has become a component in a comprehensive lymphedema treatment program.

- *Kinesio Tex Gold*™, which was the original tape, has a wave-like adhesive pattern that is designed to improve the circulation of blood and lymph. This pattern has spaces between the lines to allow the skin to breathe as perspiration passes freely between the skin and air.



Kinesio Tape in use to treat truncal lymphedema. © [Lymph Notes](#)

- **Kinesio® Tex Platinum™**, which is a newer style of tape, features a diamond-pattern adhesive pattern. Because this is a different type of tape, that is designed for uses such as treatment of sports injuries, the manufacturer recommends that only therapists with appropriate training use this type of thape.

### Kinesio Tex Tape® Characteristics

Gold Kinesio Tex Tape® is:

- Latex free and can be used safely by those with a latex allergy.
- Made of a highly elastic woven fabric with a stretching length of about 30 to 40% of its resting (non-stretched) length.
- Has a medical grade heat sensitive acrylic adhesive on the back on the tape in a wavelike pattern. The tape, with the adhesive backing, is placed on a protective paper backing with the tape at a 10% stretch.
- Designed to be the same thickness of the epidermis (outer layer) of the skin. This is an important in lymphedema treatment to stimulate the flow of lymph.
- The tape is very light and comfortable when placed properly.
- Even with showering and swimming, the tape remains effective for 3-5 days before it needs to be replaced.

### How Kinesio Taping Works with the Lymphatic System

- **Skin:** The tape can be applied on the skin in a manner that causes a massage-like skin movement that directs lymph away from an affected area. When placed over areas of fibrosis, the lifting action and increased movement of skin also assists in softening these tissues.
- **Muscle:** The motion of the tape, and its action on sensory receptors in the skin, can improve muscle contraction. Deeper lymphatic vessel function is enhanced by the nearby pumping action of muscle contraction and relaxation.
- **Joints:** The tape can be placed to stabilize joints that have been affected by lymphedema.
- **Circulation:** As the tape affects the muscles and skin it also improves the ability of blood to flow in and out of the treated area. This improved circulation aids in healing.
- **Neurological:** Swelling places pressure on sensory receptors in the skin causing pain, numbness or reduced sensitivity. When excess fluid is removed the pressure is reduced and the ability of these receptors to communicate with the brain is mproved.

### Kinesio Taping and Lymphedema

Kinesio Tape can:

- Be very helpful as an adjunct to hands-on lymphedema treatments and compressive therapy as provided by a qualified lymphedema therapist.
- Be particularly useful in the reduction of truncal, head, and neck lymphedemas or areas where compression therapy is difficult or not appropriate.
- Assist in the reduction of extremity lymphedema when it is also placed on the trunk.
- Help soften fibrosis and can also be used in combination with compression therapy and skilled treatment.

### The Removal of the Tape

Although the therapist usually applies the tape, the patient or a caregiver is usually responsible for removing the tape approximately three days later. The following precautions

should be followed in doing this.

- Kinesio tape adheres very well to the epidermis (outer layer) of the skin. To prevent injury to this delicate structure, the tape should gently be removed without lifting or pulling.
- If tape is pulled off, it can cause the upper layer of the skin to separate from the lower layers. This damage creates what looks like a second degree burn. Should this happen, this damaged tissue should be treated as such a burn.
- When removing the tape hold the end at approximately a 45 degree angle to the skin surface. Then gently push the skin down to remove it from the adhesive.
- An alternative is to apply oils to the cotton fabric. These could be oils such as those used for skin care, massage, or cooking. The cotton will absorb the oil and when gently massaged into the tape, will help loosen the adhesive attachment from the skin.

### Frequently Asked Questions

**Will Kinesio Taping replace my compressive garments?** It has not yet been proven that Kinesio Taping can replace compressive garments. However it can be worn in areas where garments do not help. Also the tape can be worn under garments or compression wraps to soften fibrosis or reduce toe and finger edema.

**Does Kinesio Taping work for everyone?** Everything has limitations and it is important to have a full evaluation by a qualified lymphedema therapist trained in this method as everyone is unique and for this reason each taping is also.

**Can I use adhesive tape to get the same beneficial results? No! No! No!** Adhesive tape does not have any stretch or give. When a swollen area, such as a hand, it can cause the swelling to increase and it can block the circulation. This creates a tourniquet-like effect that can block the circulation, damage the tissues, and be very painful.

### References

[1] Special thanks to **Ruth Coopee OTR/CHT**, a leading authority on the treatment of lymphedema through the use of this technique. She is a Dr. Vodder trained Manual Lymph Drainage/Combined Decongestive Therapist and a Certified Kinesio Taping Instructor. More details about Ruth's extensive qualifications and her many activities can be found on her website [www.bodyholistics.org](http://www.bodyholistics.org)

[2] The [Kinesio Taping Association](http://www.kinesiotaping.org) website.

[3] **Kinesio Taping® for Lymphoedema and Chronic Swelling** by K.R. Stockheimer MS OTR/L CKTI and K. Kase DC. Kinesio Taping 2004.

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