Lymphedema Management

What is Lymphedema?

Lymphedema is a pathological condition characterized by:

- Obstruction to lymphatic vessels (by scar tissue or tumor)
- Tissue fluid and lymph fluid stasis (decreased movement of fluid)
- Decreased reabsorption of lymph fluid
- Accumulation of fluid in tissue spaces
- Increased risk of infection
- Risk of fibrosis of tissue

What can cause Lymphedema?

- Any trauma which effects the lymphatic system
- Radiation can cause scar tissue and decreased lymphatic fluid transport
- Removal of lymph nodes decreased transport capacity of lymphatic system
- Scars from surgical procedures can impede lymphatic fluid movement

What are symptoms of Lymphedema?

- Aching, heaviness, numbness, tingling
- Tightness, swelling or thickening
- Burning sensation which radiates downward
- Hypersensitivity to pain

What contributes to a persons risk for developing Lymphedema?

- Varying genetic makeup of lymphatics and vascular system
- Surgery (lumpectomy or mastectomy)
- Damage to lymphatics (surgery or trauma)
- Radiation (dosage and location)

What can increase your risk of developing Lymphedema?

- tight fitting clothing (bra straps, heavy purse straps)
- tight fitting jewelry
- having blood pressure taken on the affected side
- injection or blood draw on affected side
- cuts on the affected extremity
- poor skin and nail care
- flying

What kind of treatment is available for Lymphedema?

- Manual lymphatic drainage techniques by a trained therapist
- Self massage techniques as instructed by therapist
- Exercise activities to improve lymphatic function
- Bandaging of the affected extremity to improve lymphatic reabsorption
- Use of a compression sleeve when optimal reduction is reached

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