

# Lymphedema Prevention

## INFORMATION FROM THE NATIONAL LYMPHEDEMA NETWORK

### Who is at risk??

Any person who has had either a simple mastectomy, lumpectomy, or modified radical mastectomy in combination with axillary node dissection and, often, radiation therapy.

\*\*\*\* Lymphedema can occur immediately postoperative, within a few months, a couple of years or even 20 or more years after cancer treatment.

***With proper education and care, lymphedema can be avoided or, if it develops, kept under control.***

- Absolutely do not ignore any slight increase of swelling in the arm, hand fingers or chest wall (consult with your doctor immediately)
- Never allow an injection or blood drawing in the affected arm(s)
- Have blood pressure checked in the unaffected arm (can be taken in the leg)
- Keep the "at risk" arm clean. Use lotion (Eucerin or Nivea) after bathing. Make sure skin is dry including in any creases and between the fingers
- Avoid vigorous, repetitive movements against resistance with the affected arm (scrubbing, pushing, pulling)
- Avoid heavy lifting with the at risk arm. Never carry heavy handbags or bags with an over-the-shoulder strap
- Do not wear tight jewelry or elastic bands around the fingers or arm(s)
- Avoid extreme temperature changes when bathing, washing dishes, or sunbathing (no sauna or hot tub).
- Keep the arm protected from the sun
- Avoid any trauma (bruising, cuts, sunburn, sports injuries, insect bites, cat scratches)
- Wear gloves while doing housework, gardening or any type of work that could result in even minor injury to the skin
- When manicuring your nails, avoid cutting your cuticles (inform your manicurist)
- Exercise is important, but consult with your therapist. Do not overtire the arm at risk. If it begins to ache, lie down and elevate it. (Recommended exercises: walking, swimming, light aerobics, bike riding) do not lift more than 12 pounds
- When traveling by air, patients with lymphedema must wear a compression sleeve or compression bandages
- Patient with large breasts should wear a light breast prosthesis (a heavy prosthesis may put too much pressure on the lymph node above the collar bone). Soft pads may have to be worn under the bra strap. Wear a well-fitted bra that is not too tight and with no wire support
- Use an electric razor to remove hair from axilla. Maintain electric razor properly replacing heads as needed to minimize risk of irritating the skin
- Patients who have lymphedema should wear a well fitted compression sleeve during all waking hour. At least every 6 months, see your therapist for follow up.
- Warning: if you notice a rash, blistering, redness, increase in temperature or fever, see your physician immediately. An inflammation or infection in the affected arm could be the beginning of lymphedema or worsening of lymphedema
- Maintain your ideal weight through a well-balanced, low sodium, high fiber diet. Avoid smoking and alcoholic beverages. Lymphedema is a high-protein edema, but eating too little protein will not reduce the protein element in the lymph fluid; rather it will weaken the connective tissue and worsen the condition. The diet should contain protein that is easily digested, such as chicken and fish.



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