

Can Lymphedema Be Prevented?

While there is currently no cure for lymphedema, there are things you can do to reduce your risk of developing lymphedema. The risk of lymphedema is life-long. Following these preventative steps will greatly reduce the possibility that you will develop lymphedema:

DO

- ▶ rest your arm or leg while recovering from surgery or radiation treatment
- ▶ exercise and stretch, but avoid strenuous activities, such as those that make you sweat, until after you've completely recovered from surgery or radiation
- ▶ when traveling by air, wear a professionally fitted compression garment, which is a long sleeve or stocking made to compress the arm or leg to encourage the flow of lymph fluid out of the affected arm or leg
- ▶ protect your arms and legs from sunburns or other burns



DON'T

- ▶ don't wear clothing or jewelry that feels tight or uncomfortable
- ▶ don't carry purses, briefcases, or heavy packages with your affected arm
- ▶ don't apply heat, such as with a heating pad, to your affected limb
- ▶ don't do repetitive activities, heavy lifting, or pulling
- ▶ don't use hot tubs or saunas

For Further Information on Lymphedema

The National Lymphedema Network
1-800-541-3259
www.lymphnet.org

The American Cancer Society
1-800-ACS-2345
<http://www.cancer.org>

National Cancer Institute
1-800-4-CANCER
<http://cancer.gov>

The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation
1-800-I'M AWARE (1-800-462-9273)
www.komen.org

Y-ME National Breast Cancer Organization
1-800-221-2141 (English)
1-800-986-9505 (Spanish)
www.y-me.org

To Find a Certified Lymphedema Therapist

Lymphology Association of North America (LANA)
1-773-756-8971
<http://www.clt-lana.org>

National Lymphedema Network
1-800-541-3259
www.lymphnet.org



State of New York
Eliot Spitzer, Governor
Department of Health

Have You Had Cancer Treatment?

- ▶ If you have ever had radiation or surgery for cancer, **LYMPHEDEMA** is something that you need to know about.

What Is Lymphedema?

Lymphedema (LIMF-eh-DEE-ma) is the unhealthy buildup of lymph fluid in your body. Lymph fluid helps fight infection and disease by collecting and moving bacteria, viruses, and waste through your lymphatic system, flushing it from your body. When extra fluid builds up in the body, it causes swelling, usually in an arm or leg. **Lymphedema** results from common cancer treatments such as surgery and radiation. It can develop soon after treatment, or may show up many months, years, or even decades later.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LYMPHEDEMA THERAPY, WOODBURY, NY

Lymphedema can:

- ▶ lead to infections
- ▶ cause pain and discomfort
- ▶ be a long-term condition
- ▶ be controlled through awareness and treatment

*Once you develop **lymphedema**, it can be managed, but it cannot be cured. It is important that you do everything you can to help prevent it from developing.*

What Are the Symptoms of Lymphedema?

The symptoms of **lymphedema** often appear slowly over a period of years. Even if you don't develop symptoms in the year following cancer treatment, you may still be at risk. If you have had surgery or radiation treatment for cancer and begin to notice any of the following symptoms, you may have **lymphedema**, and should call a doctor:

- ▶ pain, aching, or redness in an arm or leg, including fingers or toes
- ▶ swelling (with or without pain) anywhere in your body that lasts for 1 to 2 weeks
- ▶ jewelry or clothing feels tight but there is no weight gain
- ▶ a feeling of weakness, heaviness, or tightness in the arm or leg
- ▶ repeated infections in the arm or leg
- ▶ hardening and thickening of the skin on the arm or leg
- ▶ a temperature of 100.5 degrees Fahrenheit or higher that isn't related to a cold or flu

What Is The Treatment for Lymphedema?

If you have **lymphedema**, there is effective treatment to reduce the swelling, prevent the condition from getting worse, and limit the risk of infection. Experts generally recommend Complete Decongestive Therapy (CDT) for people with **lymphedema**. CDT is a combination of treatments that include special massage for lymph drainage, exercises, compression, and skin care. These treatments should be given by a certified **lymphedema** therapist or someone who has received special **lymphedema** therapy training. Early treatment focuses on reducing the swelling and controlling the pain, and can shorten the time that treatment is needed.

It is important that you be involved in your **lymphedema** treatment:

- ▶ So that you can better understand the signs and symptoms of **lymphedema**, contact any of the organizations listed in this brochure's For Further Information section.
- ▶ Get professionally fitted for a compression garment. (To find a certified **lymphedema** therapist, see The National Lymphedema Network or The Lymphology Association of North America contact information listed at the end of this brochure.)

Infection is a common problem with **lymphedema**. To protect against infection:

- ▶ use antibacterial creams for all cuts, scrapes, insect bites, etc. on the affected arm or leg
- ▶ use the unaffected arm for blood tests, IVs, injections, and blood pressure readings
- ▶ wear protective gloves when doing chores such as washing dishes or gardening
- ▶ frequently apply fragrance-free, hypoallergenic lotion to avoid dry, chapped skin

If any part of your affected arm or leg feels hot, looks red, or swells suddenly, you should call your doctor as these symptoms could be a sign of an infection and you may need antibiotics.

Where Can I Get Support for Lymphedema?

Attend **lymphedema** support group meetings in your community. These meetings are a good way to connect with people who understand what you're going through. The National Lymphedema Network website or hotline can provide a list of support groups around the country.

Participate in online message boards and chat rooms. Make sure that the site you go to is recommended by a reputable source, such as The National Lymphedema Network. If you don't have internet access, call any of the hotline numbers listed at the end of this pamphlet.