



EXCELLENCE IN CARING

# HEALTHY AGING INFORMATION

*We have all your aging needs covered*

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## What is lymphedema?

Lymphedema refers to swelling caused by an abnormal accumulation of lymphatic fluid in the tissues of the body. Lymphedema most commonly affects the extremities, but can also occur in the head, neck, trunk, abdomen and genitals.

The lymphatic system is made up of an extensive network of vessels and nodes that span the entire body and carry the fluid called lymph. The lymphatic system absorbs, filters and transports the lymphatic fluid which is made up of water, proteins and waste products. Lymphedema may occur when this network has been damaged or blocked due to injury, cancer, surgery or from a malformation of the lymphatic system.

Lymphedema can adversely affect a person's participation in daily activities. A person may experience limb heaviness, movement impairments and pain. Psycho-social impacts of lymphedema may include negative emotional feelings, negative self-identity and negative body image.

## What are the risk factors for developing lymphedema?

Anyone who undergoes surgery or trauma involving the lymphatic system is at risk for developing lymphedema. Risk factors after surgery for cancer include lymph node removal, radiation therapy and infection. Additional risks factors include weight change of greater than 10 pounds after surgery, excess weight or obesity, older age and rheumatoid or psoriatic arthritis.

## What can I do to reduce the risk of developing lymphedema?

- Protect your arm or leg from injury - cuts, scrapes or burns - that can lead to infection.
- Use sunscreen SPF of 30 or higher.
- Avoid medical procedures, such as blood draws, IV placement and vaccinations on the affected arm.
- Have blood pressure taken on the unaffected arm.
- Avoid tight, constrictive clothing.



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## **What can I do to reduce the risk of lymphedema (continued)?**

- Moisturize your skin often.
- Maintain a healthy weight and active life style.
- Avoid extreme temperatures.
- Wear compression garments when traveling.

## **What symptoms should I report to my medical professional?**

- Swelling of any part of the limb, including fingers and toes
- A change in the firmness of the skin, hardening or thickening
- A feeling of heaviness or tightness of the limb
- Discomfort, aching or tingling
- Infection
- Fluid collecting in a surgical area

## **How is lymphedema treated?**

Complete Decongestive Therapy (CDT) is the current standard of care for the treatment of lymphedema. Therapists who receive specialized training and instruction in CDT are Certified Lymphedema Therapists (CLT).

There are four components to this comprehensive approach to treatment:

1. Manual lymph drainage (MLD) techniques for mobilizing and rerouting lymph fluid.
2. Compression therapy used to maintain the size of the limb, support the tissues of the limb and prevent re-accumulation of fluid.
3. Decongestive exercise prescription to optimize the joint and muscle pump promoting fluid transport.
4. Education on skin care for protecting the skin and reducing the risk of injury and infection.

*Menorah Park's Peter B. Lewis Aquatic & Therapy Center has an occupational therapist certified in the treatment of lymphedema. To make an appointment, call us today at 216-595-7345.*