

LYMPHEDEMA

Background

The lymphatic system is made up of ducts and nodes throughout our bodies. The lymphatic system helps return fluid to the heart and helps our bodies fight infections. Lymph nodes are found in groups throughout the body.

What is lymphedema?

Lymphedema is a disease that happens when there is blockage or damage to any part of the lymphatic system. The disease can be genetic or due to infection, cancer or cancer treatments.

Why does it matter?

When the lymphatic system does not work properly, fluid accumulates in the skin and results in swelling. In the beginning stages, the fluid may get better by elevating the arm or leg. This may lead to feelings of heaviness, pain, difficulty moving limb and disfigurement. The buildup of fluid can cause the skin to hardened and change color. If untreated, the swelling can become severe and not resolve with elevation. There is also an increased risk of infections, ulcers and other complications.

What are the treatments?

There is no cure for lymphedema. It is important to understand your body and the disease. A lymphedema specialist can help you manage your symptoms and prevent complications. Lymphedema therapy can help reduce the size of your limb and reduce the hardened tissue. This is done with compressive bandaging, lymphatic massage, exercises and compression garments. Compression sleeves, stockings and in some instances a pump may help prevent swelling. Insurance may not cover lymphedema garments. Surgical intervention may be an option for certain cases.

How do I prevent complications?

- Skin protection is very important.
- Moisturize skin daily. Avoid tight clothing and jewelry. Avoid blood draws and blood pressure checks in the affected limb.
- If you are overweight, losing weight may help reduce the limb size.
- Eat a healthy diet, including fresh fruits and vegetables. Avoid processed foods.
- Exercise daily - if you are unsure of what you can do, see your physician.
- Get adequate sleep and minimize stress in your daily life.

Who do I contact?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding lymphedema, contact:

- Your healthcare provider
 - Social worker
 - Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation
- National Lymphedema Network

305-243-4129

305-243-6605

<http://www.lymphnet.org>



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