

Avoiding Lymphedema Tips

If you have had a simple, modified radical or radical mastectomy, a lumpectomy with axillary node dissection, or radiation therapy, you are at risk to develop lymphedema. Lymphedema can occur immediately after surgery, within a few months, or most commonly two to five years postoperative. There is no cure for lymphedema, but with proper education and care, it can be controlled, maintained, and often avoided.

Please review these tips carefully, discussing them with your physician or therapist when necessary:

1. Never allow an injection or blood to be drawn from the affected arm(s).
2. Never have blood pressure taken on the affected arm(s). If bilateral, use a thigh cuff.
3. Never ignore even slight swelling in the fingers, hand, arm or chest wall. Consult with your physician immediately.
4. Never wear tight jewelry or elastic bands around the affected fingers, wrist or arm.
5. Never carry a heavy purse or shoulder bag and avoid heavy lifting with the affected arm(s).
6. Avoid vigorous, repetitive movements (scrubbing, pushing, and pulling) with the affected arm(s).
7. Avoid extreme and rapid changes in water temperature (hot or cold) on affected arm(s).
8. Keep the affected arm(s) clean and dry.
9. Avoid minor injuries (bruising, cuts, sunburn, cat scratches). Wear gloves when doing housework or gardening to prevent minor cuts and scratches.
10. Avoid insect bites to the affected arm(s). Consult your physician if you suspect infection.
11. Be careful when manicuring your nails. Avoid cutting nail cuticles on affected arm(s).
12. Be very careful
13. Consult your physician immediately if you notice a rash, blistering, redness, or fever in the affected arm(s). An inflammation or infection could be the beginning or worsening of lymphedema.
14. Always wear a well-fitted compression sleeve when traveling by air to compensate for change of cabin pressure.
15. Maintain a well-balanced low sodium, high fiber diet. Avoid smoking and alcoholic beverages.
16. Elevate the affected arm(s) at all possible times and during sleep.
17. Exercise regularly (consult with physician or therapist). Recommended exercises; walking, swimming, light aerobics, bicycle riding, and yoga. Avoid overtiring the affected arm(s).

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