LYMPHEDEMA: What you need to know

- Jessica Sorano, PT, DPT, CLT
- Lisa Moore, PT, DPT, CLT-UE
• Lymphedema: what is it?
• How does it present/signs and symptoms
• How is it treated?
• Complications of non-treatment
• Do’s and dont’s of lymphedema
• Frequently asked questions:
  • If I have lymph nodes taken out, will I get lymphedema?
  • Is it curable?
  • Will flying cause lymphedema?
  • How often do I have to wear a garment?
  • Can I exercise?
• I have lymphedema: now what?
What is lymphedema?

• The lymphatic system is responsible for collecting proteins, fats, and cellular waste products from the tissues and transporting them to lymph nodes.

• The nodes contain infection-fighting cells called lymphocytes that destroy these waste products and return the fluid back to the heart.

• Lymphedema is an accumulation of this lymphatic fluid which can back up into the arms, legs, neck or torso when the lymphatic system is damaged.
Signs and symptoms

- Heaviness
- Difficulty moving the affected limb
- Tight fitting clothing or jewelry
- Puffy or swollen appearance
- Difference in sizes between limbs
- Redness or skin changes
Stages of Lymphedema

**Stage 0**
- No visible signs of swelling
- Tissue appears normal

**Stage 1**
- Edema is soft/pitting
- Swelling will wax and wane spontaneously
- Elevation may help

**Stage 2**
- Tissues may become “hardened” pitting does not occur
- + stemmer sign
- Swelling no longer wax and wanes spontaneously

**Stage 3**
- Extreme increase in fluid volume
- Fibrosis is present
- Skin changes occur such as papillomas, deep skin folds etc.
How do I reduce my risk?

• Risk-reduction practices include:
  • Skin care
  • Activity and lifestyle
  • Avoiding limb constriction
  • Compression garments (If appropriate)
  • Avoiding extremes of temperature
How is it treated?
How is it treated?

MLD: Manual lymphatic drainage:

Specialized strokes that moves stagnant lymph fluid to armpits or groin.

** Demonstration**
How is it treated?

Compression bandaging:
Lotion
Stockinette
Foam
Short Stretch compression band

** Pass out bandages
How is it treated?

Nail & Skin Care:
- Keep nails short & clean
- Do not clip cuticles of affected hand/foot
- Keep skin hydrated
How is it treated?

Compression garments:
Specially designed to give graduated pressure to bring swelling out of limbs.
Machine washable
Many different types, textures, colors
How is it treated? Exercise

MUSCLE PUMP EFFECT

RELAXED   CONTRACTED

muscle   lymph vessel

image of a dumbbell and a leg in a cast
How is it treated? Exercise!
Complications of non-treatment

Cellulitis

Permanent skin changes

Wounds
Do’s & Don’t’s

Do:

• Wear your compression garments daily
• Exercise daily
• Keep skin clean and nails trimmed

Don’t:

• Damage skin: sunburns, needle sticks, scratches
• Wear tight clothing or jewelry/watches
• Avoid blood pressure taken from affected arm
Frequently Asked Questions:

• Q. If I have lymph nodes taken out, will I get lymphedema?
• Q. Can exercise make lymphedema worse?
• Q. If I fly will it give me lymphedema?
• Q. Is it curable?
• Q. How often do I have to wear a garment?
I have lymphedema...now what?

Referral to lymphedema trained specialist...they will:

Evaluate your skin and swelling

Measure your limb

Establish a care plan that may include manual lymphatic drainage, bandaging, compression garments and exercise.
Questions?
For more information…

• National Lymphedema Network
  www.lymphnet.org

• Lymphatic Education & Research Network
  www.lymphaticnetwork.org

• American Cancer Society
  www.cancer.org

• Lymphology Association of North America
  www.clt-lana.org