



What is Lymphedema?

In your research on information about breast cancer, you may have come across a condition called lymphedema. Lymphedema affects the lymphatic vessels, which are responsible for transporting protein-rich lymph fluid back into the circulatory system. When lymph vessels or lymph nodes are missing, impaired, damaged, or removed, the fluid isn't properly transported or filtered, and a build-up occurs. This results in swelling and thickening of the skin.

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For more information about lymphedema,
please visit:
www.mylmphedema.com



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Breast Cancer Patients:

What You Should Know About Lymphedema and Compression Therapy





Are you at risk?

Lymphedema may develop after breast surgery or treatment because there is a change in the pathway that drains the fluids in your lymphatic system. It may occur within a few months after a procedure, years later, or not at all. If you've had any of the following procedures, there's a chance you may be at risk:

- Simple mastectomy in combination with axillary (arm pit) lymph node removal
- Lumpectomy in combination with axillary lymph node removal
- Modified radical mastectomy in combination with axillary lymph node removal
- Combined cancer surgery and radiation therapy to a lymph node region (such as the neck, armpit, groin, pelvis or abdomen)
- Radiation therapy to a lymph node region

What are the symptoms?

A small amount of swelling is normal for the first four to six weeks after surgery, so it's important to talk to your doctor about what you should look for in terms of lymphedema. If you notice any of the following symptoms, call your health care provider right away because prompt treatment can help get the condition under control. If left untreated, however, it can become worse.

- Swelling characterized by "pitting," which is when the skin is depressed for a few seconds and the indentation does not immediately disappear
- Swelling in the arms, hands, fingers, shoulders, chest, or legs
- A "full" or heavy sensation in the arms or legs
- Decreased flexibility in the hand, wrist, or ankle
- Skin tightness
- Difficulty fitting into clothing in one specific area
- Tight-fitting bracelet, watch or ring that wasn't tight before

How graduated compression therapy can help

Although there is no cure, lymphedema can be controlled. Wearing graduated compression garments is one of the easiest and most important ways you can manage lymphedema. Be sure to talk to your doctor about lymphedema and compression therapy.