

Leg Lymphedema Program Guidelines

Listed below are guidelines for patients who have lymphedema of the leg. By following these guidelines, you may prevent infection and other conditions which could lead to a worsening of your lymphedema.

- **Try to avoid any injuries to the skin.** Injuries, even small ones, will result in destruction of lymph vessels. In addition, injury brings more lymph fluid into the injured area.
- **Wear proper footwear.** High heel shoes or shoes that are too tight are not only unhealthy, but they increase the risk of injury to the foot.
- Do not walk barefoot
- Use caution when playing with pets. Scratches and bites can become infected.
- Take precautions to avoid insect bites. A simple mosquito bite can cause cellulitis and further increase the size of your leg. Wear insect repellent when outdoors.
- Take extra precautions when caring for your feet. Do not use a razor or sharp instrument to cut corns or calluses. Use a nail file carefully when filing toenails and a pumice stone to loosen dead skin.
- Inform all health care personnel that you have lymphedema. Avoid injections or any acupuncture treatment of your affected leg.
- **Do all activities in moderation.** Use caution when doing exercises or participating in sporting activities. Avoid movements that over strain or exercises that put extra weight on your muscles. Walking is an excellent exercise with proper footwear and a compression stocking. Swimming is another excellent exercise which does not cause stress on the joints.
- **Try to avoid heat.** Heat tends to increase swelling of an area. Do not use saunas. Do not sunbathe, and if possible, try to take vacations in cooler climates. When taking a shower, keep the temperature warm, but not hot
- **The affected arm should NOT be exposed to**
 - Hot packs, moist heat, hot air or short wave treatments
 - Classical Swedish massage
 - Cosmetics which could irritate the skin
 - Extreme change in temperature (hot/cold)

- Try to avoid carrying heavy bags, purse or other heavy objects with your affected arm.
- During the day, take time to elevate your leg for a few minutes. Elevation helps promote the drainage of the fluid from your leg.
- Avoid sitting or standing for a long period of time. When you do sit, do not cross your legs.
- **Wear clothing that fits properly.** Clothing that is too tight tends to restrict the proper flow of the lymph fluid. Tight panties, girdles or undergarments tend to cut into the skin. Wear undergarments that are loose and comfortable. Women should avoid garter belts, or any tight clothing. Men should ensure that the socks are not too tight or binding.
- **Nutrition is important!** There is not special diet for lymphedema. However it is important to maintain a normal weight. Today most nutritionists recommend a low salt, low fat diet. Salt tends to make the body retain fluid and fat keeps the fluid in the tissues.

General Rules

- Wear your bandages at night and the compression stocking during the day
- Elevate the affected leg at night.
- Do the exercises you learned daily.
- When traveling by airplane, wrap your leg with the compression bandages during the flight.
- See your doctor if you have any signs of infection (heat, reddening of the skin, fever, chills, further swelling) fungal infection of the feet, or any questions about your lymphedema.