

Arm Lymphedema Program Guidelines

Listed below are guidelines for patients who have lymphedema of the arm. 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.
- **Be careful when doing housework or working in the garden.** Avoid sharp, pointed objects such as kitchen knives, scissors or gardening tools. Always use oven mitts when removing hot pans from the oven. Be especially careful not to burn yourself when ironing or cooking. Try to avoid harsh cleaners and chemicals which could irritate the skin
- 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 arm. Wear insect repellent when outdoors.
- Be careful when doing nail care. Do not cut your nails and cuticles with scissors. Use a nail file or pumice stone. Avoid artificial nails.
- Inform all health care personnel that you have lymphedema. Do not allow blood to be drawn or blood pressure taken from the affected arm.
- **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. Do not let your arms hang down. Swimming is another excellent exercise which does not cause stress on the joints. Sports such as tennis, golf, cross country skiing or weight lifting are not recommended.
- **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.
- Knitting and needlepoint should be done only for a short period of time.
- If you work in an office, take frequent breaks to stretch and move your arms. Repetitive movements as at a computer can cause retention of fluids in your arms.
- **Wear clothing that fits properly.** Clothing that is too tight tends to restrict the proper flow of the lymph fluid.
Wear a bra that does not cut into the shoulders or bind too tight around the middle.
Wrist watches and rings should fit comfortably and not be worn for long periods of time on the affected arm
- **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 sleeve during the day
- Elevate the affected arm at night.
- Do the exercises you learned daily.
- When traveling by airplane, wrap your arm 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) or any questions about your lymphedema.