



LYMPHEDEMA AFTER BREAST CANCER

KNOW YOUR
RISK



30% OF PEOPLE WHO UNDERGO BREAST CANCER TREATMENT WILL DEVELOP LYMPHEDEMA.

Lymphedema is a chronic condition where a fluid rich in protein called lymph collects in the tissues just below the skin, causing swelling. It results from a damage to the lymphatic system, whether it was poorly developed from birth, or damaged from surgery, radiation, or a trauma. The lymph



nodes and vessels that have been damaged or removed cannot be replaced, so the lymphatic drainage routes are reduced or altered.

Lymphedema usually affects the upper and lower limbs, but can also develop in the breast/chest area and genitals.

Breast cancer surgery may increase the chances of developing lymphedema due to the fact

that some lymph nodes under the arm are often removed. Lymphedema can also be caused by cancer cells blocking the lymph nodes, as well as radiation therapy.

Most people who have had the lymph nodes removed under their arms will not develop lymphedema. However, it is crucial to be aware of the risk and promptly deal with any swelling that develops.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?



Swelling

Following breast cancer surgery, you will notice some swelling in the arm and chest area. This will usually subside after about 3 months. If swelling in your arm, hand, breast or chest develop, it is recommended to get professional advice.

Tightness

The arm or breast can feel tight as these are areas where the extra fluid is retained in the tissues. Feeling tightness is not always necessarily associated with swelling. Gentle exercise may help to relieve the discomfort.

Dry Skin

When swelling occurs, the skin stretches and can become dry and flaky. It is important to take good care of dry skin as it could crack and increase the risk of infections such as cellulitis.

Always keep the skin clean and moisturized with an unscented and hypoallergenic cream.

Arm stiffness

A swollen arm may limit movement in the joints. It is important to keep exercising the affected area to help reduce swelling and stiffness. Avoid movements that strain your arm or keep it in the same position for a prolonged period of time. Physiotherapy can also be helpful.

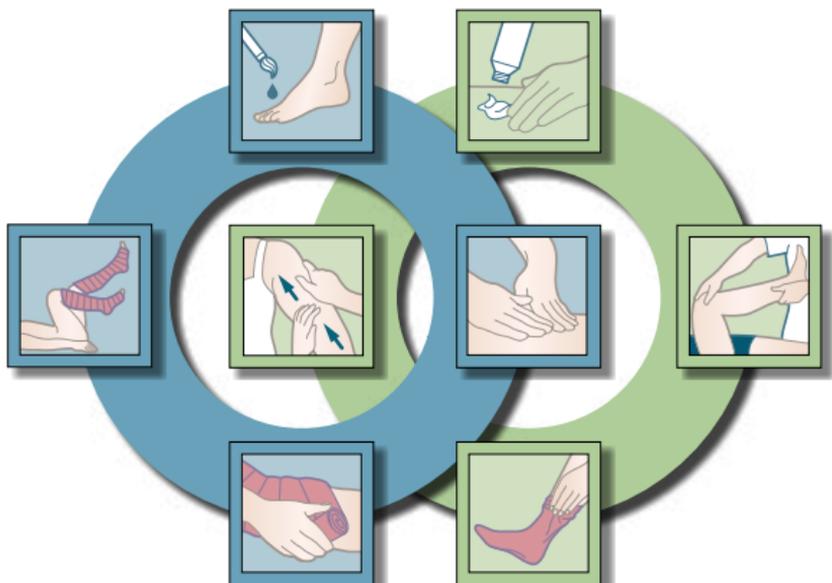
TREATING LYMPHEDEMA

The goals of lymphedema therapy are quite basic: reduce the size of the limb, then maintain that decreased size.

The earlier you get a diagnosis, the easier it becomes to control your lymphedema and lower the risk of worsening your condition.

Treating lymphedema relies on 4 main elements :

- Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD)
- Compression Therapy
- Skin Care
- Exercise



LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE

Lymphatic drainage is a special type of gentle massage to improve lymph flow, direct fluid to other drainage pathways, and unblock or soften hard tissue.

Manual lymphatic drainage aims to eliminate bacteria, toxins, viruses, wastes and excess water, and addresses blocks in lymphatic circulation, which may cause congestion and edema.

Four basic techniques are used: stationary circles, pumping, rotation and scooping, which are followed by stroking the tissues toward the sites of normal lymphatic drainage.

COMPRESSION THERAPY

Once your lymphatic vessels have been “awakened” with Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD), compression is applied to help move the extra fluid out of the limb, and to keep it from coming back into the limb.

The idea behind compression therapy is to assist the tissue by applying pressure from the outside, which helps move the fluid into the lymphatic system, where it is filtered, concentrated, and returned to your body.

The type of compression therapy you need depends on whether the swelling is mild, moderate or severe.

SKIN CARE

People with lymphedema are at risk for cellulitis and other skin infections because their bodies are less able to fight infection. Bacteria can get into your body through a break in the skin, fungal infections (under nails), an existing wound or another entry point. This is why good skin care is so important.

Take care of your skin, to lower your risk of infection:

- Use mild soap, rinse and dry your skin well
- Use an unscented, non-allergenic moisturizer daily
- Deal with any scratches, pinpricks, cuts, burns or splinters right away with disinfectant and antibiotic ointment
- Wear insect repellent to avoid bites. If you get a bite, use an anti-inflammatory lotion/spray to avoid scratching it
- Use sunscreen to protect against sun burns
- Avoid cutting your cuticles and take extra care when having a manicure or pedicure to avoid cuts
- Get treatment to clear up skin conditions like inflammations, athlete's foot, dermatitis, fungal infections and others
- Use an electric shaver instead of a razor if you need to shave the affected area

- Watch for signs of infection and consult a health professional immediately if you think you may have a skin infection
- Speak to a healthcare professional about a prescription for antibiotics when you travel outside the country
- Wear protective gloves when gardening and rubber gloves for household chores
- Wear long oven mitts when using the oven
- Where possible, try to have injections, blood tests or vaccinations in the arm that is not affected



EXERCISE

Regular exercise is a key part of your lymphedema self-care. By moving your muscles and breathing more deeply, you stimulate your lymphatic system and help your lymph flow.

The **benefits** of **regular exercise** **include:**

- Enhances blood and lymphatic circulation
- Improves joint mobility
- Increased muscle strength, fitness and less injury
- Helps to get to or maintain a healthy body weight
- Overall mental and physical wellness

Exercise safely, ideally with the advice of your self-care team: your physician or nurse, lymphedema therapist and fitness specialist. Be aware that many fitness specialists or personal trainers are unfamiliar with lymphedema. You'll need to educate them about the condition, what helps you and what you need to avoid. You can also refer them to your lymphedema therapist for information about the benefits and risks of exercise to help manage lymphedema.

TYPES OF ACTIVITY



The key is finding activities that fit into your life and that you enjoy. Your lymphedema therapist can advise you about safe exercise and different ways to be active.

- Pool exercises like water aerobics, water lymphatic therapy or just walking in water (water pressure is like a natural compression garment, especially when you stand and move against it)
- Walking, gentle cycling, dancing and light aerobics
- Yoga and Pilates; however, if you have upper body lymphedema, ask your instructor for alternatives to poses that require static weight-bearing of the arms (e.g. downward dog)
- Changing activities to avoid overusing one area, e.g. if you have arm lymphedema, vacuum one room at a time rather than the whole house in one go

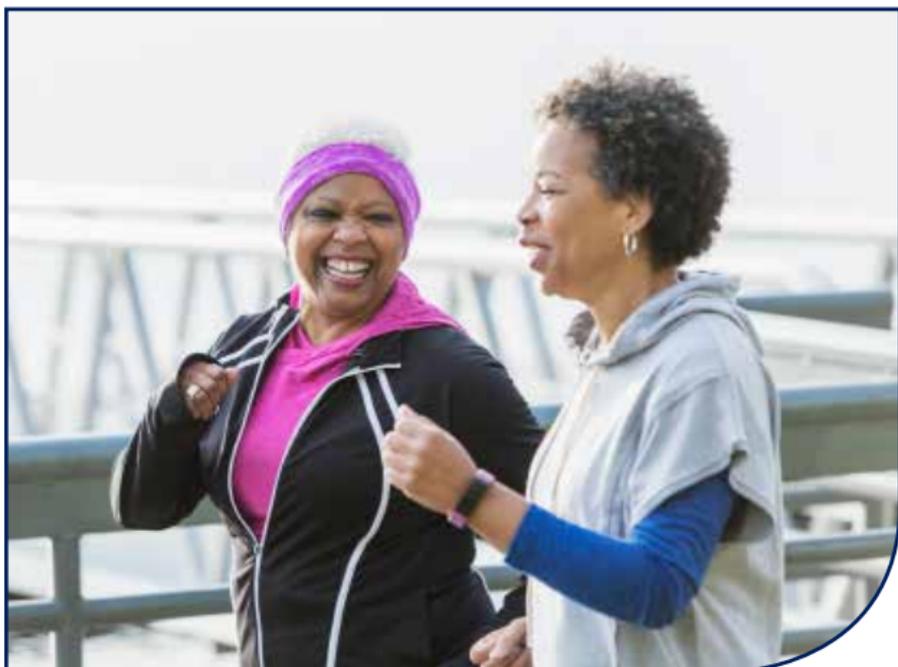
GUIDELINES FOR EXERCISE

- Measure your affected area before starting a new activity, and monitor it over time
- Wear a well-fitting compression garment while you exercise
- Start slowly (for a short time with low repetitions and low weights)
- Progress at your own pace, build your strength and stamina slowly, and don't overdo it
- Gentle stretching and rest after any type of cardiovascular exercise or strength training
- Get advice on equipment use, body posture and positioning to prevent injury
- Make time for deep breathing and water breaks to stay hydrated
- Pay attention to any signs of pain or discomfort during/after exercise and modify as needed
- Monitor for changes in swelling and keep a record of measurements

Sources:

Canadian Lymphedema Framework, www.canadalymph.ca

Breast Cancer Care, www.breastcancercare.org.uk



JOBST® GARMENTS TO HELP MANAGE YOUR LYMPHEDEMA

Bella Lite

Armsleeves, gauntlets, and gloves designed for patients with mild to moderate lymphedema who are recently diagnosed, post-operative, or who do not need containment of a flat knit garment. The lightweight fabric is breathable, comfortable, and easy to don - perfect for patients learning to make garment compliance part of their daily routine.



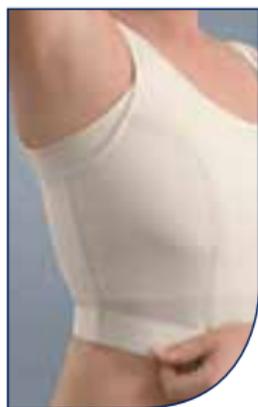
Elvarex®

JOBST® Elvarex® represents the gold standard in custom daytime garments for the management of lymphedema. These flat-knit garments offer the very best in comfort and containment for even the most severe cases.



Bellisse®

Chest wall garment designed to promote healing after breast cancer surgery by providing uniform, gentle compression. Used in conjunction with JoViPads, Bellisse encourages drainage of edema in the chest walls, which can aid in recovery.



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