

JOBST®



LYMPHEDEMA AFTER
BREAST CANCER

THERAPIES. HAND IN HAND.

BSN medical

an Essity company

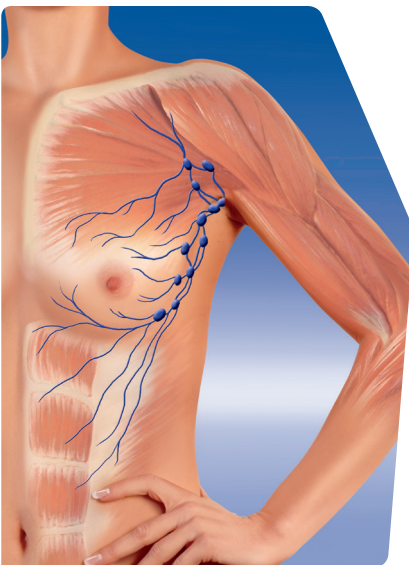
WHAT IS LYMPHEDEMA?

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. Sometimes, lymphedema can be caused by cancer cells blocking the lymph nodes.

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 later on, 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 therefore 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 pillars :

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



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.

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 employed: stationary circles, pumping, rotation and scooping, which are followed by stroking the tissues toward the sites of normal lymphatic drainage

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, if needed
- 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 burning
- 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 health professional about a prescription for antibiotics when you travel outside the country



SKIN CARE TIPS IF YOU HAVE LYMPHEDEMA OF THE ARM

- Wear protective gloves when gardening and rubber gloves for household chores
- Wear long oven mitts when using the oven
- If you go for a manicure, let your aesthetician know that you are at risk for infection and that the equipment must be properly sterilized
- Some cancer treatments affect nail growth; if your nails are weak and tear easily, take special care when you cut them
- Use high protection sunscreen and/or wear protective clothing to prevent burning
- 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:

- Improved blood and lymphatic circulation
- Improved muscle strength, so you feel stronger
- Better joint mobility
- Increased fitness and less injury
- Helping 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 family doctor 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 aqua fit, aqua 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
- Gentle stretching and rest after any type of cardiovascular exercise or strength training
- 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

- Before starting any new activity, let your trainers or instructors know that you have lymphedema.
- Avoid sudden activities that your body is not used to, such as joining a gym and overdoing it on the first day or moving a lot of furniture in your home over a short time
- 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
- 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





JOIN THE JOBST® COMMUNITY



Learn about venous conditions and people at risk



Save money with exclusive programs, promotions and mail-in rebates



Receive monthly newsletters with useful information and tips



Watch helpful application videos

www.jobstcanada.ca

Browse through the [LymphCommunity](#) section and find out more about lymphedema, its symptoms, treatment and available resources.



BSN Medical Inc.

4455 Autoroute Laval W, Suite 255
Laval (Québec) H7P 4W6

www.jobstcanada.ca
www.bsnmedical.ca
Tel: 1 877 978-9567
Fax : 1 877 978-9703