Healthy Habits for Patients at Risk for Lymphedema

Healthy Lifestyle:

A healthy diet and exercise are important for overall good health.

- Maintain optimal weight through a healthy diet and exercise to significantly lower risk of lymphedema.
- Gradually build up the duration and intensity of any activity or exercise. Review the Exercise Position Paper.*
- Take frequent rest periods during activity to allow for recovery.
- Monitor the at-risk area during and after activity for change in size, shape, tissue, texture, soreness, heaviness, or firmness.

Skin Care:

Make sure that your skin is in good condition.

- Keep your at-risk body part clean and dry.
- Apply moisturizer daily to prevent chapping/chafing of skin.
- Pay attention to nail care and do not cut cuticles.
- Protect exposed skin with sunscreen and insect repellent.
- Use care with razors to avoid nicks and skin irritation.

Medical Check-ups:

*Find a certified lymphedema therapist (CLT).**

- Review your individual situation, get screened for lymphedema, and discuss risk factors with your CLT.
- Ask your CLT or healthcare professional if compression garments for air travel and strenuous activity are appropriate for you.
- If a compression garment is recommended, make sure it is properly fitted and you understand the wear, care, and replacement guidelines.
- Set a follow-up schedule based on your needs with your CLT.
- Report any changes in your at-risk body part to your CLT.

Infection Education:

Know the signs of infection and what to do if you suspect you have one.

- Signs of infection: rash, itching, redness, pain, increased skin temperature, increased swelling, fever, or flu-like symptoms.
- If any of these symptoms occur, contact your healtcare professional immediately for early treatment of possible infection.
- If a scratch or puncture to your skin occurs, wash it with soap and water, apply topical antibiotics, and observe for signs of infection.
- Keep a small first aid kit with you when traveling.

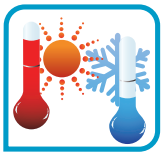
TRY TO AVOID POSSIBLE TRIGGERS

Injury or Trauma

- Wear gloves while doing activities that may cause skin injury (eg, washing dishes, gardening, using chemicals like detergent).
- Try to avoid punctures (eg, injections and blood draws).

Limb Constriction

- Wear loose jewelry and clothing.
- Avoid carrying a heavy bag or purse over the at-risk limb.
- Try to avoid blood pressure cuffs on the at-risk limb.



Extreme Temperatures

- Avoid exposure to extreme cold, which can cause rebound swelling or chapping of skin.
- Avoid prolonged (> 15 min.) exposure to heat, particularly hot tubs and saunas.

Prolonged Inactivity

At-risk for leg lymphedema?

- Avoid prolonged standing or sitting by moving and changing position throughout the day.
- Wear properly, fitted footwear and hosiery.

Please Note: These guidelines are meant to help reduce your risk of developing lymphedema and are NOT prevention guidelines. Because there is little research about risk reduction, many of these use a common-sense approach based on the body's anatomy and knowledge gained from decades of clinical experience by experts in the field. Risk reduction should always be individualized by a certified lymphedema therapist and healthcare professional.

National Lymphedema Network

*To review the NLN's other position papers visit www.lymphnet.org