

CANCER INSTITUTE PROGRAMS

Steps for Prevention of Lymphedema

1. Elevate the limb at risk.
2. Wear a compression garment if you have swelling in the limb.
3. Do gentle exercises regularly.
4. Avoid heat and extreme cold.
5. Avoid deep tissue massages.
6. Avoid tight clothing on the limb.
7. Avoid injury and keep skin meticulously clean.
8. Practice good eating habits.

What is Lymphedema?

LYMPHEDEMA is an abnormal accumulation of protein and water in body tissue. Lymphedema causes swelling of arms, legs and/or torso, which can cause pain, loss of function and range of motion. There is also a high risk of complication from infection and leakage of lymph through the skin.

Are YOU at risk?

Lymphedema generally occurs as a result of a dysfunctional lymphatic system. A number of conditions can place a person at risk of developing lymphedema. Most often, surgical removal (i.e. breast or abdominal surgery) of a tumor and the adjacent lymph nodes and vessels can block lymph fluid from flowing naturally, thus causing lymphedema. Lymphedema can occur immediately in the post surgical period or several years later. Women, who have had simple mastectomy, lumpectomy or modified radical mastectomy in combination with axillary node dissection and have been treated with radiation therapy, are particularly at risk for lymphedema. Skin cancer (melanoma), gynecology cancers, bladder and colon cancer and prostate or testicular cancer are other surgeries that require node removal and can possibly lead to lymphedema.

How to recognize lymphedema

Lymphedema can be recognized by an unexplained swelling usually beginning in the hands and feet. If allowed to continue, the areas of swelling may increase and harden (fibrosis) and lead to further discomfort. Early diagnosis and treatment improve both prognosis and the condition.

Hoag Hospital's Lymphedema Clinic

Hoag Hospital's Lymphedema Clinic combines the skills of physical therapists and lymphedema specialists for the treatment of patients with lymphedema through Complex Decongestive Therapy. Complex Decongestive Therapy is not a cure, but treatment that can return edematous extremities to a manageable size, resulting in greater function.

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What is Complex Decongestive Physical Therapy?

Complex Decongestive Therapy is a physical management program for the reduction of swelling to the limbs due to lymphedema. The treatment involves:

1. Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD) is a specialized light stroking massage which facilitates removal of abnormal fluid accumulation in the tissue.
2. Bandaging
3. Lymphedema exercises
4. Compression garments
5. Education and support

Successful Complex Decongestive Therapy greatly increases limb comfort and range of motion. In addition, the risk of life-threatening infection can be diminished.

For further information please contact the Lymphedema Clinic at Rehabilitation Services., call 949-764-5645