

Treatment for Lymphedema

Lymphedema is not curable, but it is controllable. The aim of treatment is to improve appearance, increase function, and prevent further progression of the swelling. Treatment should begin as soon as lymphedema has been diagnosed. If left untreated, lymphedema can result in irreversible damage. However, treatment can be very effective - even for people who have had lymphedema for many years - and greatly improve quality of life.

The best and most effective treatment for lymphedema is CDT which has five major components:

- 1. Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD)** is a gentle massage-like technique. It opens the collateral lymphatic pathways to move the excess fluid to areas where the lymph system is functioning.
- 2. Compression Therapy/Bandaging and Garments** are an essential component of lymphedema management. Keeping the limb wrapped in a multi-layer low-stretch bandage during treatment can decrease the excess fluid, and help to soften the tissues. After treatment, a strong gradient compression stocking or sleeve can help maintain results.
- 3. Exercising** according to recommended CDT protocols can help stimulate the lymphatic system and get the fluid moving.
- 4. Meticulous Skin and Nail Care** is crucial on the affected limb to prevent skin cracking. Using low pH soaps and lotions can help protect against bacterial infections (which can lead to cellulitis).
- 5. Instructions in Self Care**



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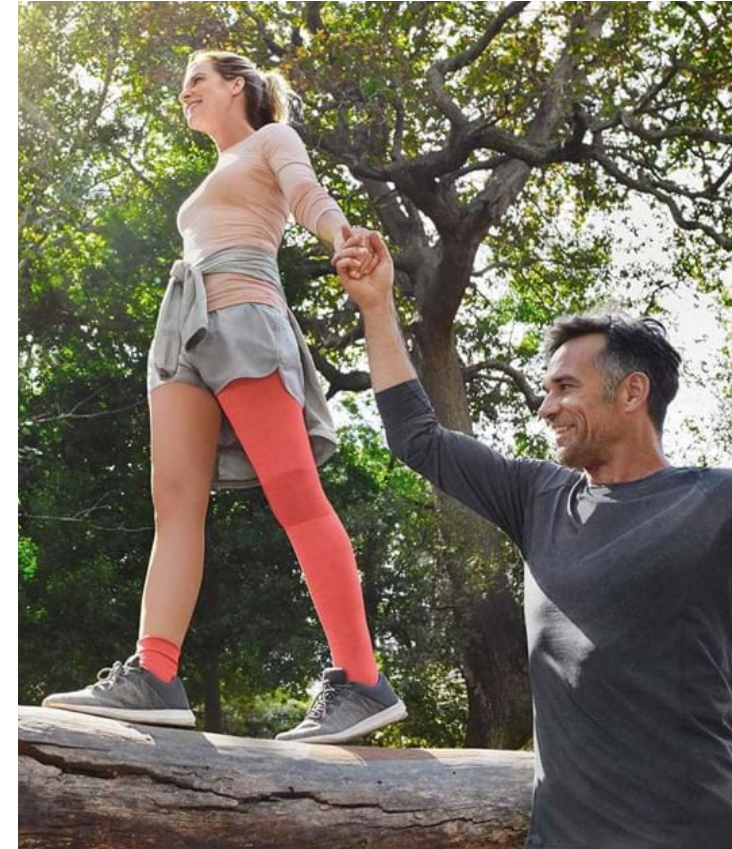
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What is Lymphedema?

Lymphedema is a condition resulting in swelling of one or more limbs and often the corresponding quadrant of the trunk, caused by the disruption of the lymphatic system. It is a chronic, often progressive disorder that places one at risk for a grossly enlarged limb and skin infections.

What can Cause Lymphedema?

The condition may occur following some surgeries, trauma, disease or radiation therapy, which results in damage to the lymph system. Occasionally it is due to congenital absence or malformation of the lymphatic system. Conditions that may result in lymphedema include:

- Cancer or cancer surgery, including lymph node removal
- Cardiac bypass surgery with vein graft harvest
- Deep vein thrombosis
- Healing from orthopedic injuries/surgeries
- Obesity
- Stroke
- Venous insufficiency

First Signs of Lymphedema:

- Heaviness
- Tight clothing or jewelry
- Aching
- Swelling in specific area
- Burning
- Non-healing wounds
- Stiffness
- Hardening of limb



What is Involved in Lymphedema Treatment?

A highly effective treatment is known as **Complete Decongestive Therapy (CDT)**. This state-of-the-art treatment, recommended by the International Society of Lymphology, often includes two to four weeks of treatment and the independent use of compression garments at home.



What are Treatment Results?

With treatment adherence and use of compression garments, results include:

- Maintained reduction of swelling to normal or near normal size
- Wound healing and reduced risk of skin infections
- Softened skin texture and improved skin health
- Improved functioning of the affected limb
- Improved quality of life through effective swelling control



Precautions

- Never have blood drawn or blood pressure cuffs on an affected limb
- Avoid lifting heavy objects such as luggage or purses
- Avoid breast prostheses
- Avoid tight clothing, especially undergarments
- Avoid hot baths, hot showers, hot tubs, saunas
- Use care with rings, watches, bracelets, which can be constrictive
- Use sunscreen to minimize dangerous skin exposure
- Use electric razors to prevent razor nicks and cuts
- Be aware that infections can result from insect bites, manicures, pedicures, skin punctures, cuts, pet scratches, gardening, etc.
- When traveling, always wear a compression garment or bandages. On plane trips over 1 hour, it is suggested that you get up and move around in the aisles as much as possible. In a car, stop and walk around for a few minutes every hour.

Note: Always refer to your provider for complete medical advice and treatment plans. This brochure is not intended to substitute for medical care.