



LYMPHEDEMA

Lymphedema is the build up of protein rich fluid (lymphatic fluid) in the tissues beneath the skin. This causes swelling in the arm and hand and occasionally in the chest/breast/back on the side of surgery. Lymphedema happens when something is not working as well as it should in the lymphatic system.

Causes of Lymphedema

- Unknown causes (ideopathic)
- After an infection that interrupts normal lymphatic pathway function
- Traumatic injury to the lymph nodes
- Surgical removal of a tumor and adjacent lymph nodes and vessels
- Radiation therapy

Symptoms

- Pain or fullness in an arm or leg
- A heavy feeling in your arm
- A tight sensation in your arm or hand
- Decreased flexibility in your hand or wrist
- Shirt sleeves or jewelry that feel tight
- Skin that may “pit” with any finger pressure
- Affected arm or hand is warm, red, swollen or a fever develops

Reducing Your Risk

- Have injections or blood drawn from the unaffected arm
- Have your blood pressure taken from the unaffected arm
- Wear gloves when doing house or yard work
- Keep your arm clean and dry and moisturize after bathing.
- Protect your skin from the sun with sunscreen and protective clothing
- Avoid lifting or carrying heavy bags, purses or other objects with your at-risk arm

Treatment

- Arm elevation
- Compression sleeve
- Manual lymphatic drainage – gentle arm massage to stimulate movement of lymphatic fluid. Wrapping the arm and hand is also included to reduce swelling.
- Exercise

- Weight loss

See your doctor if you have any symptoms or notice unusual changes in your health.