
Lymphedema Precautions

Lymphedema is swelling of the arms or legs. It is caused by a blockage in the lymphatic system. The blockage prevents lymph fluid from draining. As the fluid builds up, the swelling continues. Lymphedema can be controlled by taking good care of the affected arm or leg.

Important things to remember for your arm(s):

- Keep your affected arm clean. When drying it, be gentle, and give special attention to any creases and between your fingers. Put lotion on the area after drying.
- Wear gloves while doing housework, gardening or any type of work that could result in even a small injury.
- Keep your arm(s) protected from sun.
- When cutting your nails, avoid cutting your cuticles.
- Talk with your therapist about a healthy exercise schedule including walking, swimming, light aerobics, bike riding and ballet or yoga.
- Wear a well-fitted bra without underwire support that is not too tight. You may also need to wear soft pads under the bra strap. If you have large breasts, wear a light breast prosthesis (heavy prosthesis may put too much pressure on the lymph nodes above the collarbone).
- Use an electric razor to remove hair from under your arm. Change razor heads often.
- Choose a well-balanced, low-sodium (salt), high-fiber diet. Avoiding sodium will help to reduce swelling. Eat protein-rich foods that are easily digested, such as chicken, fish or tofu.

Things to avoid with your arm(s):

- Do not wear tight jewelry or elastic bands around affected fingers or arm(s).
- Do not carry heavy handbags or bags with over-the-shoulder straps.
- Avoid fast, repetitive or difficult movements with your arm, such as scrubbing, pushing and pulling.
- Avoid heavy lifting with your affected arm(s).
- Avoid severe temperature changes when bathing, or washing dishes.
- Avoid saunas and hot tubs.
- Avoid smoking and drinking alcohol

When to call the doctor:

- If you have swelling in the arm, hand, fingers, neck or chest, call your doctor right away.
- If you notice any of the symptoms below, call your doctor right away.
 - rash
 - blistering
 - redness
 - swelling
 - fever or increase in temperature

For more information contact, Reeves Rehabilitation Center at 210-358-2710.

**References: National Lymphedema network: www.lymphnet.org*