

HELPFUL GUIDELINES TO CONTROLLING LYMPHEDEMA OF THE LEG

Try to avoid any injury to the skin. Injuries, even small ones, will result in destruction of lymph vessels. In addition, injury brings more lymph fluid to the injured area.

Use caution when playing with pets. Scratches and bites can become infected.

Take precautions to avoid insect bites. A simple mosquito bite can cause cellulitis and further increase the size of your leg. Wear an insect repellent when outdoors. If possible, avoid being outside at the times when insects are the worst.

Inform all health care personnel that you have lymphedema. Avoid injections or any acupuncture treatments of your affected leg.

It is important to keep the skin moisturized. Keep the swollen leg or “at-risk” leg spotlessly clean. Use lotion (Eucerin, Nivea) after bathing. When drying, be gentle but thorough. Make sure the leg is dry in any creases and between the toes.

Do lymphedema home exercises daily as instructed by you therapist or physician. Other activities such as walking, swimming, water walking, light aerobics, and biking are also beneficial.

When traveling by air, patients with lymphedema are advised to wear a compression stocking. Additional bandages may be required on a long flight. Foot compression is often essential as well.

Maintain your ideal weight through a well-balanced, low-sodium, high-fiber diet. Avoid smoking and alcoholic beverages. Lymphedema is a high protein edema, but eating too little protein will not reduce the protein element in the lymph fluid; rather, this will weaken the connective tissues and worsen the condition. Your diet should contain protein that is easily digested, such as chicken, fish, and tofu. Drink at least 48 oz. of water per day. Follow any specific dietary recommendations give to you by your physician.

Avoid long periods of sitting and standing; lying down and walking are better. When you do sit, do not cross your legs.

Avoid any deep tissue massage that creates even minor redness of the skin.

When possible, wear natural materials instead of synthetics that can cause excessive heat and perspiration.

Be careful when doing housework or working in the garden. Do all activities in moderation. Avoid sharp, pointed objects such as kitchen knives, scissors or gardening tools

WARNING:

If you notice a rash, blistering, redness, increase of temperature, fever or chills, see your physician immediately. An inflammation or infection in the leg could be the beginning of lymphedema or a worsening of lymphedema. A cellulites infection can quickly spread. Any break in the skin, if left untreated, can cause an infection