

# LYMPHEDEMA

Lymphatic tissue throughout the body drains fluid containing protein, water, fat cells, microorganisms and cell debris into the lymphatic vessels. This fluid becomes lymphatic fluid once it enters the lymphatic system and then travels to the lymph nodes for filtering. Lymph nodes and tissues also help make white blood cells to fight infection.

Secondary lymphedema is a long-term swelling condition that occurs due to the accumulation of fluid and proteins following surgical lymph node removal, or lymph node and vessel damage from radiation, trauma, or cancer. Lymphedema can occur in any area of the body with compromised lymphatic function. Following breast cancer treatment, including lymph node removal and/or radiation, the arm and/or breast are most often affected with lymphedema. Gynecological cancers and treatment with radiation and/or surgery involving lymph nodes in the pelvis increase the risk of developing leg swelling.

The incidence of lymphedema following cancer surgery is highly variable: 10% to >30% of people who have had axillary lymph node removal have been reported to be affected by lymphedema. A combination of lymph node removal and radiation treatment places a patient at a higher risk for developing lymphedema than for a person not undergoing these treatments, or for someone who undergoes only one of these treatments.

There is decreased risk of lymphedema after breast surgery if lymph nodes are not removed or if only a few (1-3) are taken. A surgical procedure called sentinel lymph node biopsy may be an option for many patients and is now considered standard of care in checking lymph nodes for cancer. If you have not had lymph node surgery ask your surgeon if this is an option for you.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT LYMPHEDEMA

**Q. *Am I at risk for lymphedema?***

**A.** Anyone who has had lymph nodes removed, radiated and/or damaged from cancer is at risk for lymphedema. They are also at a higher risk for developing infections in the region that the removed lymph nodes used to drain, such as the arm and upper back and chest.

**Q. *What can I do to reduce the risk of lymphedema and infections?***

- A.** There is no guarantee that lymphedema can be prevented, but there are steps you can take to reduce the risk:
- Avoid tight clothing and jewelry on the afflicted limb because it may prevent good lymphatic flow. If it leaves a mark on your skin, it is too tight.
  - Return to your previous activities slowly following surgery. Avoid activities such as contact sports, heavy lifting, and strenuous exercise, especially if you had not done these activities before surgery. Otherwise, gradually add them back into your daily routine and monitor any changes in size or softness of your arm.
  - Practice low impact exercise daily such as stretching, walking and swimming. Restoring your shoulder range of motion is an important way to help reduce your risk of developing lymphedema.
  - Use lotion on your affected arm, upper back, and chest everyday. Nivea or Eucerin are excellent choices. Keeping your skin moist is a good way to help prevent infections.
  - Do not permit blood to be drawn, injections or IVs to be given, or blood pressure to be taken on the affected limb. Any puncture of your skin can allow bacteria on your skin to enter your system and cause an infection or worsen lymphedema.
  - Always practice meticulous hygiene and skin care; keep the skin well moisturized; use an antiseptic for cuts or scratches and keep them covered until they scab over.
  - Take steps to avoid insect bites, breaks in the skin or other injuries to the limb.
  - Consult your physician immediately if any sudden swelling, rash, itching, redness or increase in temperature occurs in the affected limb.
  - If lymphedema does develop, it should develop slowly. If your skin is shiny and stretched from a quick onset of moderate to severe edema, especially if combined with redness, warmth of the area, and pain, you may have another condition that is causing swelling. Consult your doctor.

**Q. *Is there a cure for lymphedema?***

**A.** At this time there is no cure for lymphedema. However, it can be managed effectively if treated early.

**Q. *What can be done to treat lymphedema?***

**A.** A combination of techniques is used to treat and manage lymphedema. Complete Decongestive Therapy (CDT) includes manual lymphatic drainage, skin care, compression bandaging, prescription compression garments (sleeves), and exercise with gentle muscle contractions. Pneumatic sequential compression pumping may also be used, depending upon the school that your practitioner attended for certification.

**Q. *Who provides the treatment for lymphedema?***

**A.** An occupational or physical therapist who is certified in treatment techniques. There is a certification by the course or school attended, and also national certification through the Lymphology Association of North America.

## **LYPHHEDEMA RESOURCES**

**American Cancer Society .....800-ACS-2345**  
www.cancer.org (800-227-2345)  
Free information regarding lymphedema is available upon request.

**Beyond Physical Therapy ..... 310-578-5960**  
2903 W. Washington Blvd., Marina del Rey, CA 90292  
www.beyond-pt.com/MLD.html  
Provides lymphedema patient care and management education.

**Cedars-Sinai Outpatient Rehabilitation Center ..... 310-423-9200**  
444 S. San Vicente, Suite 701, Los Angeles, CA 90048  
www.csmc.edu/3959.html  
Provides evaluation and treatment of lymphedema.

**Dynamics Orthotics and Prosthetics ..... 213-383-9212**  
1830 W. Olympic Blvd., Suite 123, Los Angeles, CA 90006  
www.walkagain.com  
Resource center for prostheses, bras, lymphedema sleeves, compression garments etc. Service available in Spanish and Korean. An appointment is necessary. Medicare, Medi-Cal and most private insurances are accepted.

## **ENCORE Program**

**YWCA of Santa Monica/Westside ..... 310-452-3881**

2019 14th Street, Santa Monica, CA 90405

[www.smywca.org](http://www.smywca.org)

Free exercise classes and peer support program for breast cancer patients, with lymphedema, during treatment and post-treatment.

## **Health-O-Med, Inc.**

**Home Health Medical Equipment..... 323-654-6890**

7606 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90046

[www.homemedicalequipmentla.com](http://www.homemedicalequipmentla.com)

Resource center for prostheses, bras, swimsuits, lymphedema products, hospital beds and wheelchairs. Service available in English, Armenian, Russian and Spanish. No appointment necessary. Medicare, Blue Cross Medi-Cal and some private insurance are accepted.

## **Huntington Hospital**

**Constance G. Zahorik Breast Center ..... 626-397-5153**

50 Bellefontaine, Pasadena, CA 91105

[www.huntingtonhospital.com](http://www.huntingtonhospital.com)

Lymphedema skilled physical therapists work with patients to provide evaluation, education (including how to apply compression bandages), lymphatic mobilization and therapeutic exercise. Staff and patients work together to develop home programs that will decrease lymphedema and help in continuing the activities of daily living.

**Intimate Image..... 818-876-7333**

22941 Ventura Blvd., Unit M, Woodland Hills, CA 91364

[www.intimateimage.com](http://www.intimateimage.com)

Resource center for prostheses, bras, swimsuits, camisoles, lymphedema sleeves and compression stockings. Head coverings such as hats, wigs, caps and turbans are also available. Perform customized fittings. Appointments are preferred. Medicare, Blue Cross, Blue Shield, Kaiser and most HMO's and private insurance accepted.

**Lymphedema Center - Emily Iker, MD ..... 310-829-7472**

2021 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 620 East, Santa Monica, CA 90404

[www.lymphedemacenter.com](http://www.lymphedemacenter.com)

The Lymphedema Center is a diagnostic and treatment center for lymphatic disorders.

**National Lymphedema Network ..... 800-541-3259**

1611 Telegraph Avenue, Suite 1111, Oakland, CA 94612

[www.lymphnet.org](http://www.lymphnet.org)

Comprehensive pre-recorded information to access resources on support, education and the treatment of lymphedema.

**Pomona Surgical Supply Co ..... 909-623-4378**

733 E. Holt Avenue, Pomona, CA 91767

Resource center for prostheses, bras and lymphedema sleeves. No appointment is necessary. Medicare is accepted.

**Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center**

**Department of Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation ..... 909-865-9810**

1798 N. Garey Avenue, 1st Floor, Pomona, CA 91767

[www.pvhmc.org/PhysicalTherapy/index.asp](http://www.pvhmc.org/PhysicalTherapy/index.asp)

Certified physical therapists in the treatment of lymphedema provide comprehensive, decongestive, physical therapy, a treatment and prevention program for lymphedema, including education and skin care, scar tissue management, manual lymph drainage, compression, bandaging and exercises. A physician referral and, if required, insurance authorization is necessary prior to scheduling the first appointment.

**Presbyterian Intercommunity Hospital**

**Patricia L. Scheifly Breast Health Center**

**Mariposa Boutique ..... 562-698-0811 ext. 5638**

12393 Washington Boulevard, Whittier, CA 90602

[www.pih.net](http://www.pih.net)

Resource center for breast prostheses, mastectomy bras, lymphedema bras and sleeves, compression stockings, swimsuits, wigs, hats, turbans, and other mastectomy and lymphedema supplies. Certified mastectomy fitter on site. Medicare, contracting HMO's and private insurances are accepted. Appointments are necessary.

**Rehabilitation Services at City of Hope ..... 626-359-8111 ext. 62412**

1500 E. Duarte Road, Duarte, CA 91010

[www.cityofhope.org/Rehabilitation/LymphedemaServices.htm](http://www.cityofhope.org/Rehabilitation/LymphedemaServices.htm)

Certified Occupational Physical Therapists provide evaluation and treatment of lymphedema. By appointment only. A physician referral, and any necessary insurance authorization, should be obtained prior to scheduling a first appointment.