

## Lymphedema Lifestyle

No one expects to be diagnosed with lymphedema, but you can thrive with proper care and lifestyle changes.



*Find out how you can  
help manage lymphedema!*

## The Lymphatic System

Understanding lymphedema begins by understanding how the lymphatic system operates.

Your lymphatic system is a web of specialized vessels containing lymph fluid that cover your entire body. The lymphatic system removes toxins and delivers important nutrients to tissues. Through a network of small, hollow, pearl-like structures called lymphangions and lymph vessels, the fluid returns to your blood vessels. Throughout this process, lymph nodes help break down waste and perform immune functions to keep you healthy.

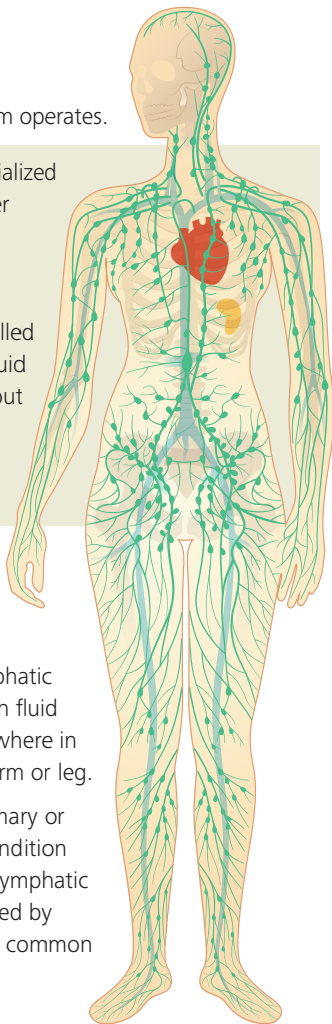
## What Causes Lymphedema?

Lymphedema is caused when your lymphatic system is unable to move enough lymph fluid efficiently. Lymphedema can occur anywhere in the body, but it usually occurs in your arm or leg.

Lymphedema can be designated as primary or secondary. Primary lymphedema is a condition where you are born with a malformed lymphatic system. Secondary lymphedema is caused by another disease or condition. The most common though, is secondary lymphedema.

### Risk factors:

- Surgery (cancer, orthopedic, cosmetic)
- Trauma
- Radiation treatment for cancer
- Cancer
- Infection





### **Symptoms of lymphedema include:**

- Swelling of part or all of your arm, leg, face, neck, abdomen or genitals and may include hands, feet, fingers, and toes
- A feeling of tightness or heaviness
- Limited range of movement
- Aching, discomfort or pain
- Recurring infections
- Fibrosis (changes in the skin texture)

## **Lymphedema and Compression Garments**

Compression therapy helps by minimizing fluid build-up and improving lymph fluid flow. Compression therapy reduces limb volume. Wearing compression garments can decrease pain, lessen numbness, and improve your ability to move. Compression therapy allows wearers to complete their daily activities, while improving overall health and quality of life. Compression is often combined with manual lymphatic drainage, also called decongestive therapy.



## **Prevention for Cancer Patients**

If you're going to have surgery or you've had it in the past, talk with your doctor about your risk for lymphedema.

Follow these steps to reduce your risk:

- Rest your arm or leg while recovering
- Avoid heat on your arm or leg
- Elevate your arm or leg
- Avoid tight clothing or jewelry
- Keep your arm or leg clean – inspect your skin daily and watch closely for any changes or breaks in your skin and report to your health care provider

Q:

Now that you better understand the lymphatic system and lymphedema, take our short self-assessment to see if compression therapy can help you manage lymphedema.

- Have you noticed any changes to your legs or arms in size, shape or how they feel to you?
- Have you had cancer treatments?
- Are you currently or have you received radiation treatment?
- Are you overweight or obese?
- Have you recently undergone surgery, either planned or as an emergency procedure?

*If you answered yes to any of these questions, ask your health care provider if compression wear is right for you!*



## Wondering what to ask your doctor?

Start out with these two easy questions:

1. I've noticed one of my arms or legs is larger than the other. What does that mean?
2. Can compression therapy help me prevent and manage my lymphedema?

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