

## Side Effects - **Lymphedema or swelling**

Lymphedema is swelling of a part of the body caused by the buildup of lymph fluids. It happens in the arm, leg, head, face or neck. It can be caused by cancer or treatment. There are many different types of lymphedema. Some types happen right after surgery, and are mild and temporary. Other types can occur months or years after cancer treatment and can be painful. These types can also develop after an insect bite, minor injury or burn.

### **People who are at risk for lymphedema are those who have had:**

- **Breast cancer.** If you had radiation therapy or had your underarm lymph nodes removed or had radiation in the underarm area after your lymph nodes were removed
- **Melanoma of the arms or legs.** If you had lymph nodes removed and/or had radiation
- **Prostate cancer.** If you had surgery or radiation therapy to the whole pelvis
- **Cancer of the female or male reproductive organs.** If you had surgery to remove lymph nodes or had radiation
- **Other cancers that have spread to the lower abdominal area.** The pressure from the growing tumor can make it hard for your body to drain fluid.
- **Head and neck cancer.** If you had lymph nodes removed and/or had radiation.

### **At first, lymphedema in an arm or leg may cause symptoms such as:**

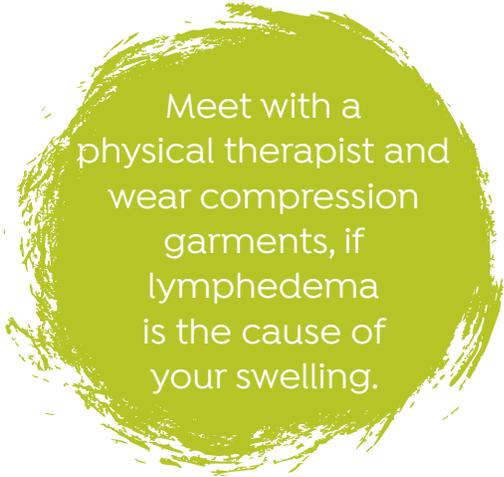
- Swelling and a heavy/achy feeling in your arms/legs that may spread to your fingers/toes
- A dent when you press on the swollen area
- Swelling that is soft to the touch and is usually not painful at first

### **Lymphedema that is not controlled may cause:**

- More swelling, weakness and difficulty moving your arm or leg
- Itchy, red, warm skin and sometimes a rash
- Wounds that don't heal and risk of skin infections that cause pain, redness and swelling
- Thickening or hardening of the skin
- Tight feeling in the skin; pressing on the swollen area does not leave a dent
- Hair loss

### **Lymphedema in the head or neck may cause:**

- Swelling and a tight uncomfortable feeling on your face, neck or under your chin
- Difficulty moving your head or neck



Meet with a physical therapist and wear compression garments, if lymphedema is the cause of your swelling.

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**Tell your health care team as soon as you notice symptoms.** Early treatment may prevent or reduce the severity of problems caused by lymphedema.



One way to prevent or relieve lymphedema is to apply lotion to keep your skin moist.

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### Take these steps to treat lymphedema:

- **Wear compression garments or bandages.** Wear special garments, such as sleeves, stockings, bras, compression shorts, gloves, bandages and face or neck compression wear. Some garments are meant to be worn during the day, and others at night.
- **Other practices.** Your health care team may advise you to use compression devices (special pumps that apply pressure periodically), laser therapy or other treatments. Weight loss, keeping the arm or leg above your chest or special types of massage can help.

### Preventing or relieving lymphedema:

- Watch for signs of swelling or infection (redness, pain, heat, fever). Tell your nurse if your arm or leg is painful or swollen.
- Keep your skin clean. Use lotion to keep it moist.
- Keep your arm or leg free of cuts, insect bites and sunburn. Try not to have shots or blood tests done in that area.
- Ask about exercises to help the body drain lymph fluid. **Talk to your health care team to ensure exercise is safe and compatible with your treatment plan before you start an exercise program.**
- Eat a well-balanced, protein-rich, low-salt diet.
- Keep regular follow-up appointments with your provider.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing on your arm or leg.
- Protect the area. Try not to use that arm or leg to figure out how hot or cold something is, such as bath water or cooked food. You may be less able to feel hot and cold now.

### Talk with your health care team

- What can I do to prevent these problems?
- What symptoms should I call you about?
- What steps can I take to feel better?
- Would you recommend that I see a certified lymphedema therapist?
- If lymphedema advances, what special garments should I wear during the day?  
During the night?