

What is Lymphedema?

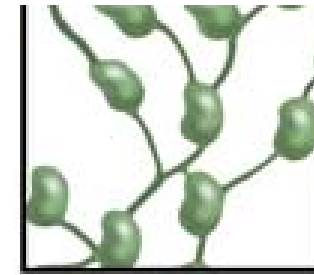
The lymphatic system collects lymph (excess fluid, proteins, and other substances) from the body tissues and carries them back to the bloodstream. Lymph is moved slowly through lymphatic vessels and is passed through the lymph nodes. Swelling ("edema") may occur when the lymph increases in the body tissues. Lymphedema occurs when the normal drainage of fluid is disrupted by a blockage or a cut in the lymph nodes in the groin area or the armpit. Lymphedema can be a hereditary condition, but it's most commonly the result of blockages caused by infection, cancer, and scar tissue from radiation therapy or the surgical removal of lymph nodes.

You're at greater risk for lymphedema if you:

- Had surgical removal of lymph nodes in the underarm, groin, or pelvic region
- Received radiation therapy to the underarm, groin, pelvic region, or neck
- Have scar tissue in the lymphatic ducts, veins, or under the collarbones caused by surgery or radiation therapy
- Have cancer that has spread to the lymph nodes in the neck, chest, underarm, pelvis, or abdomen
- Have tumors in the pelvis, abdomen, or chest that involve or put pressure on the lymphatic vessels and/or the large lymphatic duct thereby blocking lymph drainage
- Have inflammation of the arm or leg after surgery
- Are older
- Have an inadequate diet or are overweight, as these conditions may delay recovery from surgery and radiation therapy and may increase the risk for lymphedema

"I was having problems with swelling in both legs. They were keeping me from doing things I liked and needed to do around the house. Standing on ladders or just being up on my feet for long hours made me be in pain. I was very skeptical at first of what therapy could do for me.... The outcome was way above what I thought could be done."

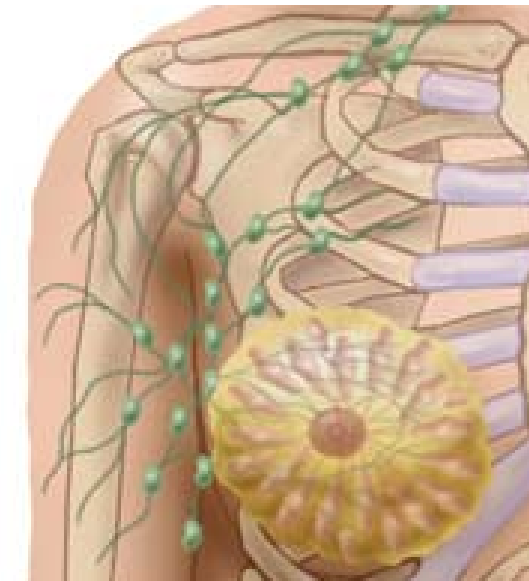
-Bill C.



Lymphedema as caused by scar tissue



Courtesy of APTA



How do I know if I have Lymphedema?

Signs and Symptoms

With lymphedema, you may have:

- Swelling in your arms, legs, shoulders, hands, fingers, or chest
- Skin that feels tighter, harder, or thicker than normal in the affected area
- Aching or a feeling of heaviness in your arm or leg
- Weakness in your arm or leg
- Inability to move certain joints, such as your wrist or ankle, as freely as usual
- "Pitting" in the tissues of your limb (an indentation that is made by pressing a finger on the skin that takes time to "fill in" after the pressure is removed)
- Clothing, rings, bracelets, or shoes that fit tighter than before
- Repeated infections in your arm or leg
- Joint pain
- Difficulty doing your daily activities

How Is It Diagnosed?

Your therapist will review your medical history and medications and perform a thorough physical examination that includes the following information:

- Your actual weight compared with your ideal weight
- Measurements of your arms and legs
- How well you're able to do activities of daily living
- History of edema, previous radiation therapy, or surgery
- The time between surgery and when you first noticed the swelling
- Other conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, kidney disease, heart disease, or phlebitis (inflammation of the veins)

What Kind of Therapist Do I Need?

Although all therapists are prepared through education and experience to treat a variety of conditions, you may want to consider:

- A therapist who is experienced in treating lymphedema
- A therapist who has completed special training in lymphedema management and has advanced knowledge, experience, and skills that may apply to your injury

21st Century Rehab, PC is proud to offer Certified Lymphedema Therapists at all of its locations!

Certified Lymphedema Therapists

Kristin Engels, DPT, CLT

Allison Herman, OTR/L, CLT

Suzy Montierth, OTR/L, CLT

Becky Phillips, DPT, CLT

Jamie Rabe, DPT, CLT, ATC

Nancy Schreier, OTR/L, CLT

Danielle Weber, DPT, CLT

Susan Woodle, DPT, CLT

Sara Zorn, OTR/L, CLT

Coming soon....

Brittany McCall, SPT

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In This Issue

- What is Lymphedema?
- Signs and Symptoms
- How can Therapy help?
- Certified Lymphedema Therapists
- Celebrate OT Month
- What's your Story?

April is OT Month!

In celebration of National Occupational Therapy Month, 21st Century Rehab would like to say "Thank You" to all of our dedicated Occupational Therapists and Occupational Therapy Assistants! This is a profession that focuses on life skills. For millions of people, the service of occupational therapy is a lifeline. People of all ages receive it to help them participate in the activities of their daily life. Sometimes people need occupational therapy to do things we take for granted: like getting dressed, being productive at school or work, eating unassisted, or even socializing.

Occupational therapy doesn't just treat medical conditions, it helps people stay engaged in the activities that give them pleasure or a sense of purpose, despite challenges. Occupational therapists do this by helping people surmount their disabilities or medical conditions to do everyday things. The nature of the therapy depends on the individual and their environment; occupational therapists consider the whole person when developing a therapy plan. Occupational therapists collaborate with physicians and other professionals to ensure a comprehensive approach.



Certified Lymphedema Therapists have special training in Lymphedema Management

How Can a Physical or Occupational Therapist Help?

Your therapist will serve as an important member of your health care team and will work closely with you to design a treatment program to help control the swelling and meet your goals for returning to your activities.

In the early stages of lymphedema, when the swelling is mild, it can often be managed by compression garments, exercise, and elevation of the affected limb to encourage lymph flow. For more severe swelling, the therapist may use a treatment called "complete decongestive therapy." The initial step often includes manual lymphatic drainage, which feels like a light form of massage and helps improve the flow of lymph from your arm or leg. This is followed by compression bandaging that helps to reduce the swelling. Your therapist will carefully monitor the size of the limb throughout your treatment sessions.

Once the limb has decreased to the desired size, your therapist will help you begin to take over your own care by:

- Developing a safe and sensible exercise program that will increase your physical fitness without unnecessarily straining your affected arm or leg
- Updating your compression garments to ensure proper fitting, working with you to find the type of garment that best meets your needs
- Educating you about proper diet to decrease fluid buildup in your tissues and skin care to reduce the risk of infection

What's Your Story?

Following knee replacement surgery, I began experiencing severe swelling in the foot, ankle, and leg. The diagnosis was Lymphedema. While a patient at Skilled Care at Story Medical, I began my first session with 21st Century Physical Therapy. I was introduced to Nancy of Occupational Therapy who explained this condition and began treatments/massage to stimulate the body's lymph glands, thereby permitting them to flow, thus reducing the fluid accumulation between the affected skin and muscle area.

Through continued adherence to the designated exercises and massage, for the time period of December 15 to February 29, as outlined by Nancy of 21st Century Rehab, the swelling has been significantly reduced. I believe the key to this reduction is constant attention and dedication to continued exercises several times per day.

Thanks, 21st Century Rehab, PT and OT, for your dedication and service as you help your many clients in their time of need.

-Carol Myers

The well Report.... the way to Live well !



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