

HELPFUL GUIDELINES TO CONTROLLING LYMPHEDEMA OF THE LEG

DO:

- Try to avoid any injuries to the skin. Injuries may result in damage of lymph vessels. In addition, injury brings more lymph fluid into 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 cellulites (erysipelas) and further increase the size of your leg. Wear an insect repellent when outdoors. If possible, avoid being outside at the time when insects are the worst.
- Inform all health care personnel that you have lymphedema. Avoid injections and be cautious of acupuncture treatments of your affected leg.
- Keep your skin supple and moist. Keep the edemic 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 your lymphedema home exercises daily, following the guidelines given to you by your therapist or physician. Recommended exercises include walking, swimming, water walking, light aerobics, and bike riding.
- Use an electric razor to remove hair from your legs. Maintain electric razor, properly replacing heads as needed. Although blades may shave closer, they also have the potential to cut the skin in this area
- Wear a well-fitted compression garment during all waking hours. If you notice a worsening of your swelling, follow-up with your doctor or therapist. If the garment is too loose, most likely the leg circumference has reduced or the garment is worn.
- 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 tissue and worsen the condition. The diet should contain protein that is easily digested, such as chicken, fish, and tofu. Drink at least 48 oz. of water per day.
- When possible, wear natural materials instead of synthetics, which cause excessive heat and perspiration.

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.
- Avoid over-using an “at-risk” leg; if it starts to ache, lie down and elevate the limb.
- Avoid long periods of sitting and standing; lying down and walking are better. When you do sit, do not cross your legs. If you work in an office, take frequent breaks to stretch and move your legs.
- Avoid sleeping in a recliner. Instead sleep in a regular bed to help the lymph fluid move out of the leg(s).
- When traveling by air or taking a long trip in a car, wear a compression garment. Additional bandaging may be required on a long flight/drive. Foot compression is often essential as well.
- Avoid any deep tissue massage that creates even minor redness of the skin.
- Be careful when doing housework or working in the garden. Do all activities in moderation. Use caution when using pointed objects such as kitchen knives, scissors or gardening tools.
- Avoid hot tubs and saunas.
- Avoid any type of trauma (bruising, cuts, sunburn or other burns, sports injuries, insect bites, cat scratches). Carry antibiotic cream or ointment with you.
- Use caution when caring for your toenails and any calluses that develop.
- Do not sunbathe, and if possible, try to take vacations in cooler climates. Hot humid weather often exacerbated swelling.

REMEMBER: *Any break in the skin, if left untreated, can cause an infection. If you notice a rash, blistering, redness, increase of temperature, fever or chills, see your physician immediately. An inflammation or infection (cellulites) in the leg can quickly spread and should be treated promptly.*

For additional information:

National Lymphedema Network - www.lymphnet.org/