

Lymphedema

Lymphedema is swelling that occurs when your lymphatic system is not working properly.

The lymphatic system helps to get rid of waste. Lymph is a clear watery fluid that carries this waste through vessels and nodes. Lymph also carries white blood cells which help your body fight infection. When your lymphatic system is damaged or blocked, lymph cannot flow well. Lymph builds up in your tissues causing the swelling we call lymphedema.

Lymphedema can develop in any area of your body. It is most common in your arms and legs, head and neck, trunk, and genital areas.

Signs of Lymphedema

Symptoms may happen slowly over time or quickly if you have an infection or injury. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these signs:

- Swelling or puffiness in an area of your body
- A feeling of fullness, heaviness, or aching
- A feeling of skin tightness
- Skin that is thick, abnormally dry, or leathery
- Rings, watches and bracelets, clothing and/or shoes fit you tighter than usual

Watching for signs of lymphedema can help find it early.

Tips to Lower Your Risk

Maintain a healthy body weight

- Talk with your treatment team about ways to manage your weight.

Stay Active

- Move your muscles and get your heart rate up
- Continue your daily activities
- Ask a physical or occupational therapist to help you with an exercise program
- Do some deep breathing

Avoid injury or infection to the area at risk for lymphedema

- Keep your skin healthy and protected
- Use lotion, insect repellent, and sunscreen
- Wear gloves for housework and yard work

Talk to a lymphedema therapist

- About whether you need a compression sleeve and glove
- About recommendations for travel
- About any questions you have

If you have lymphedema or are at risk for getting it, you should see a lymphedema therapist.

Lymphedema therapists are physical and occupational therapists who give treatment and teach patients to recognize and manage swelling on their own. To make an appointment, call 801-587-4091.