



**CALGARY  
LYMPHEDEMA  
REHABILITATION**  
AND CONSULTING SERVICES INC.

## **LYMPHEDEMA PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

- ◆ **The following are general recommendations to help individuals at risk for developing Lymphedema possibly reduce the chance of developing this condition.**
- ◆ **These recommendations may also help individuals who have developed Lymphedema possibly reduce progression of the condition.**
- ◆ **These suggestions are based largely on clinical experience, and may not be supported by published research in peer reviewed scientific journals.**
- ◆ **Unfortunately, there is no known strategy to eliminate all chance of developing Lymphedema. Lymphedema has several possible causes depending on your medical history. (Link to Services)**
- ◆ **At our clinic, our team will offer you specific recommendations to meet YOUR medical needs, and YOUR lifestyle.**

### **1. Meticulous skin care is very important.**

- ◆ **Skin care management is a critical part of CDT (Complete decongestive therapy).**
- ◆ **Keep your arm spotlessly clean with a gentle, non-perfumed, moisturizing soap, or body wash.**
- ◆ **Keep your skin healthy by using a non-perfumed moisturizer daily.**
- ◆ **Treat all cuts immediately using standard first aid protocol.**

### **2. Try to avoid cuts, scratches and skin irritation.**

- ◆ **Use rubber gloves for washing dishes.**
- ◆ **Wear heavy gloves and long sleeves when gardening, or completing yard work. Always wear footwear appropriate to the activity you are doing.**
- ◆ **Wear a thimble when sewing.**
- ◆ **Use an electric razor to shave armpit hair for your at-risk extremity(s). Keep your razor properly maintained and clean.**
- ◆ **Avoid deodorants, soaps or lotions that irritate your skin.**
- ◆ **Avoid tanning dyes on your affected extremity(s).**

- ◆ When having a manicure or pedicure, avoid having your cuticles cut in your at risk extremity(s).
  - ◆ Daily application of hand lotion can help to soften cuticles.
3. **Try to ensure that you do not have injections, intravenous lines, vaccinations, and blood pressure taken on the at-risk side.**
- ◆ Use your other arm for routine medical testing when possible. If you are a bilateral breast cancer survivor, an alternate site such as your thigh or lower leg may be acceptable. Some medical and diagnostic interventions may necessitate involvement of your at-risk extremity! Please discuss with your physician(s).
  - ◆ Wearing a Lymphedema Medical Alert Bracelet is a great way to remind you and your medical team of this precaution.
4. **Try to avoid mosquitos, wasps, bees and other biting insects.**
- ◆ Use insect repellent and wear long sleeves.
  - ◆ Use particular caution when traveling to new, unfamiliar regions of the world. Bites from unfamiliar insects may cause allergic reactions that could flare-up Lymphedema or cause other medical concerns. Filariasis parasitic infection causes secondary Lymphedema in otherwise healthy adults. Filariasis is transmitted by mosquito. Filariasis is common in certain regions and is the most common cause of Lymphedema worldwide. Education on other medical concerns should be addressed. Prior to traveling outside of Canada, visit your local travel clinic to take appropriate precautions, and notify your physician. Please check out the following Canada Public health agency website for travel clinics in your area: [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/travel/clinic\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/travel/clinic_e.html) to learn more information.
  - ◆ Bug nets when camping or traveling can reduce risk of bites. Bug nets are often available at Lee Valley, Canadian Tire & Campers Village, or check your local camping equipment store.
5. **Try to avoid sustained extreme temperature exposure.**
- ◆ When outside, use a minimum of SPF-15 sunscreen on the at risk extremity(s). Re-apply the sunscreen as recommended to reduce the risk of sunburn. Consider SPF-15 as a minimum guideline to follow.
  - ◆ Wear gloves and proper footwear in cold weather.
  - ◆ Bathe and shower in warm water. Set your home water heater thermostat to reduce risk of accidentally burning your skin.
  - ◆ Avoid prolonged exposure to extreme temperatures such as those found in hot tubs and saunas.
  - ◆ Poorly maintained hot tubs have increased potential for high bacteria counts and therefore infection risk. Avoid where possible.

- ◆ Avoid public pools when you being treated for open wounds, or if you are actively receiving chemotherapy until cleared by your supervising physician.
- ◆ Avoid activity outside during peak daytime summer heat.
- ◆ Use long padded oven mitts when baking to reduce risk of burns and heat exposure.

## **6. Avoid wearing clothing and jewelry that binds your at-risk extremity(s).**

- ◆ Wear loose jewelry, watches and clothing on your at-risk extremity(s). Consider moving jewelry to your other extremity. For instance, move your watch to your uninvolved wrist.
- ◆ Carry heavy purse and bags over your unaffected shoulder. Reduce weight of all bags and purse.
- ◆ Ensure your brassiere does not dig into your shoulder and comfortably fits around the chest wall. Have your Brassiere properly fitted. Certified fitters often have a wealth of experience and can be of great assistance. A sports brassiere may offer a comfortable alternative.
- ◆ Consider not wearing a brassiere for periods of time during your day.
- ◆ A wide, loose slack waistband may improve Lymph fluid drainage to unaffected regions.

## **7. Clinical experience suggests it is important to try avoiding straining or injuring your affected or at risk extremity(s).**

- ◆ Avoid "heavy lifting!" What is a "Heavy" lift is subjective! Several factors to consider include: your fitness, prior activity level, age, and other medical restrictions. Returning to physical activities should be carefully implemented to avoid overuse injuries such as repetitive strain, and sprains. New research supports a graduated return to activity promotes strength, endurance, mobility, and quality of life. Please work with your therapist to develop appropriate strategies to meet your goals.
- ◆ Modify Heavy lifts whenever possible. For instance, a large basket of laundry should be split into lighter loads for ease of lifting and carrying. Consider a rolling hamper to avoid carrying laundry.
- ◆ Avoid repetitive movements and repetitive lifting by splitting up your activity whenever possible. For instance, vacuum your home in stages, alternating this task with a lighter activity to provide a rest break.
- ◆ Listen to your body! If you're at risk extremity(s) begins to ache, it's time to take a break! You may not notice symptoms until after you have completed the activity. Your body is trying to give you feedback.
- ◆ Modify how you complete the activity! You may find certain activities aggravate your swelling. Work with your therapist to provide suggestions in how to effectively complete the activity independently and reduce flare-ups. Can you delegate some duties?

**8. Always wear your sleeve or bandage your arm when traveling.**

Taking regular breaks if driving.

**9. If you are flying and have Lymphedema, wear your physician prescribed compression garment(s).** Get up to stretch at least every 30 minutes, and ensure you continue to move your affected limb throughout the flight. If you have lower extremity Lymphedema, calf-pumping exercises during the flight are helpful. Stand up and walk periodically during the flight, and drink lots of clear fluids to stay properly hydrated. Consider bringing your compression bandages along to self-bandage for extra support.

**10.** Try not to lie on your affected side when resting or sleeping.

**11.** Some general Lifestyle suggestions:

- ◆ If you develop Lymphedema, activities should be resumed as soon as recommended by your physician, and with input from your Lymphedema therapist. Quality of life is very important. Let your therapist assist you in determining strategies to enable you to continue with your favorite activities.
- ◆ Eat a well balanced diet by following the Canada Food Guide.
- ◆ Drink at least 8 glasses of water / juice daily (not including coffee, tea, alcohol or caffeinated cola).
- ◆ Avoid stress or find mechanisms to effectively reduce the stress in your life.
- ◆ Avoid smoking and minimize or reduce alcohol.
- ◆ Follow a regular exercise program. A basic walking program 3-4 times a week for 30 – 40 minutes is an excellent way to improve your overall fitness and reduce stress. Swimming is an ideal activity due to the natural graduated compression benefit of the water on your limb(s). Always get medical clearance prior to starting any fitness or exercise program.
- ◆ If you have a compression garment, always wear it during your exercise session (except for swimming).
- ◆ Maintain a healthy body weight appropriate to your gender, age, height, and body type.

**12. Take appropriate First Aid and medical follow-up for injuries.**

- ◆ In the case of scratches and small cuts, treat immediately. Clean the area well with soap and water, then dry. Apply a topical antibiotic such as Polysporin, and cover the area with a Band-Aid. Watch for signs of infection! Signs of infection include increased redness, swelling, pain, streaky patches on the skin, warm skin, flu-like symptoms. Seek appropriate medical care and follow-up immediately! See your family doctor or visit a medical center for follow-up. Often a prescription for antibiotics is all you need to treat the

infection effectively. Inform your Lymphedema therapist if you have an infection. An acute infection may cause an increase in swelling. The swelling often improves after receiving appropriate medical treatment. Repeated infections are one signal to consider reassessment and appropriate treatment with your Lymphedema therapist. A course of Complete Decongestive therapy (CDT) may be warranted.

### **13. Monitor your limb over time.**

Take periodic circumferential measurements to track changes in your limb. Consider keeping an activity log to learn how different activities affect your limb(s). If you develop an infection, record details of when it occurred. Provide this information to your therapist at our clinic to assist in assessment and treatment planning.

## **Conclusion**

**Remember Lymphedema is a treatable and manageable condition! It does require you to become educated and actively involved in your care. The most important person in this process is you! Our team works with our clients to offer training and tools to help them manage Lymphedema independently. There is no “cookbook” approach to managing this condition! Everyone who develops Lymphedema manages their condition a little bit differently. A personalized program is the key!**

**The Calgary Lymphedema Centre strives to provide you with as many tools as possible to assist you in managing this condition! This is a condition that can improve with diligent treatment, and an effective self-management program. Please feel free to contact our team to schedule an assessment or follow-up if you have questions or inquiries.**