

CANCER -RELATED LYMPHEDEMA



WHAT IS LYMPHEDEMA?

Lymphedema is the build-up of lymphatic fluid in the tissues that causes progressive swelling. It occurs when the lymphatic system has been compromised and cannot function properly. There is no cure for lymphedema but it is manageable with treatment.

Certain forms of cancer treatment can compromise the lymphatic system and put you at risk of developing lymphedema:

- Surgery (e.g. lymph node biopsies or lymph node dissections)
- Radiation therapy to the lymph nodes



WHERE CAN LYMPHEDEMA OCCUR?



Lymphedema can occur anywhere in the body.

Where in the body you are at risk of developing lymphedema, depends on the lymph nodes that were removed and/or radiated.*



SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF LYMPHEDEMA



STAGE 0 Signs & Symptoms

If detected at this stage, lymphedema can sometimes be reversed.

- Heaviness
- Fullness
- Tightness
- Aching
- Tingling
- Soreness
- Itching



IMPORTANT

Certain sensations may occur in early-stage lymphedema (stage 0) before swelling is even visible. .

Other Signs & Symptoms



Related to more advanced stages of lymphedema: (Stages 1-3)

- Visible swelling (that may come and go)
- Unable to clearly see the outline of veins, tendons or wrinkles (when compared with the other side)
- Jewellery or clothing may feel tight on one side
- Pitting edema
- Tissue thickness (called fibrosis)

Not everyone is aware of "stage 0" symptoms.

As a result, you are your best advocate if you are concerned that something is feeling "out of the ordinary."

EARLY DETECTION IS IMPORTANT

It is always important to notify your medical team of these new symptoms AND to be assessed by a knowledgeable lymphedema physiotherapist as soon as possible.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE CONCERNED YOU'RE DEVELOPING LYMPHEDEMA?



REMEMBER

The sooner lymphedema is detected, the easier it is to treat. If you have ANY concerns that you are developing lymphedema, follow the steps below as quickly as possible.

1

Contact your medical doctor to inform them of your concerns. Your doctor may want to see you and/or run some other tests to rule out other possible causes for your symptoms.

&

2

In order to begin treatment, arrange to be seen by a physiotherapist trained in Complete Decongestive Therapy (CDT) as soon as possible.

WANT TO TO LEARN MORE ABOUT LYMPHEDEMA?

Head to my website for more detailed resources about lymphedema:
www.bethhoagphysio.ca

