

PATIENT INFORMATION ABOUT TECHNIQUES TO REDUCE THE RISK OF LYMPHOEDEMA

This information sheet briefly describes what lymphoedema is and illustrates simple lymph massage techniques to reduce the risk of developing it after treatment for breast cancer. For more information on lymphoedema, please visit breastcancercare.org.uk

What is lymphoedema?

The lymphatic system is made up of lymph nodes and tiny tubes called lymph vessels. These lymph vessels transport a fluid called lymph to the lymph nodes. The nodes filter out waste product, bacteria and also cancer cells that have spread from breast cancer.

Lymphoedema is swelling caused by a build-up of fluid in the body's tissue. The swelling most commonly affects the arm, hand and fingers but can also affect the chest, breast, shoulder or area behind the armpit on the back.

Lymphoedema is a long term condition once it has developed, however it can be well controlled in most cases.

Symptoms of Lymphoedema

Symptoms can vary from person to person and often mild symptoms can be well controlled. Common symptoms include, swelling, tightness and discomfort with heaviness.

Keeping the skin well moisturised will reduce the risk of the skin becoming dry, cracked and infected. Cellulitis is a sudden infection of the skin and the tissue underneath it.

To help further reduce the risk of lymphoedema:

- maintain a healthy body weight
- use your "at risk" arm to complete regular exercise
- avoid wearing tight-fitted clothing and jewellery on the "at risk" arm
- deep tissue massages can increase the fluid to the area so it is important you tell the therapist before a massage and best to avoid your "at risk" area
- Avoid having blood pressure, injections, taking blood and intravenous fluids in the "at risk" area if possible
- When travelling for longer journeys or flights keep moving your ankles, wrists and arms with circular movement on a regular basis throughout the journey

Simple lymph massage techniques

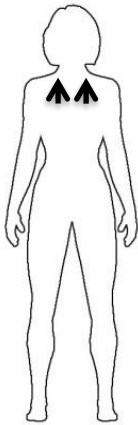
Try and complete these three steps below on a daily basis. The aim of treatment is to encourage lymph fluid to move away from the area, reducing swelling and risk of lymphoedema.

Step 1- Deep Breathing

Take 3 big and slow deep breaths, this helps the diaphragm to move and act like a pump on the lymphatic system.

Step 2- Node Tapping

This is to stimulate the lymphatic system-lymph nodes.

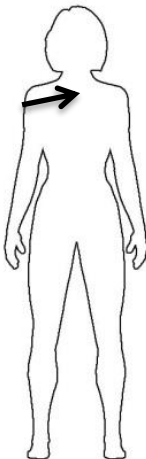


Use both hands one at either side of the breast bone just below the collar bone to tap the fingers up and down the breast bone.

Complete this for approximately 10 seconds

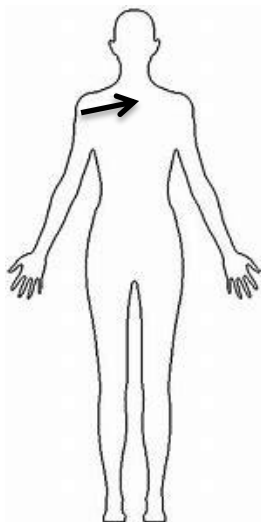
Step 3- Simple lymphatic massage

This is to encourage lymph drainage, encouraging fluid movement away from the affected arm.



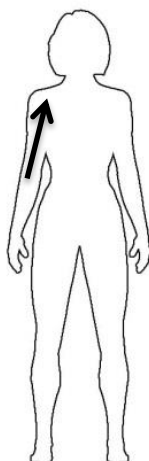
5-10 x light pressure strokes away from the operated side from shoulder and across the chest

Using the unaffected arm applying gentle pressure, stroke from the front of the shoulder across the chest towards midline. Repeat 5-10 times



5-10 x light pressure strokes from the back of the shoulder across the back

Using the unaffected arm applying gentle pressure, stroke from the back of the shoulder, across the back towards midline. Repeat 5-10 times



5-10 x light pressure strokes from the elbow to the shoulder

Using your unaffected arm applying gentle pressure, stroke from the elbow up the arm towards the shoulder. Repeat 5-10 times



5-10 x light pressure strokes from the fingers up the hand and wrist to elbow level

Using the unaffected arm applying gentle pressure, stroke from the finger tips up the back of your hand and wrist continuing up the arm towards the elbow. Repeat 5-10 times

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