

Information on Lymphedema

What is Lymphedema? Lymphedema is a protein rich swelling of a body part.

Causes of Lymphedema. Lymphedema is classified as either primary or secondary. Primary lymphedema is caused by congenital malformations of the lymphatic system and may be present at birth or develop later in life, often in puberty or during pregnancy.

Secondary lymphedema is more common and often the result of surgery, radiation, trauma, infections, removal of lymph nodes, and severe venous insufficiencies.

There are three stages of Lymphedema. Stage I may be temporarily reduced by simple elevation of the limb. Without proper treatment, the protein-rich swelling progresses into a hardening of the affected tissues known as lymphostatic fibrosis and is present in stage II lymphedema. Other complications such as fungal infections, additional hardening and often an extreme increase in volume of the swollen extremity are typical for stage III lymphedema.

Treatment offered

A Certified Lymphedema Therapist provides CDT.

Complete Decongestive Therapy (CDT): Since there is no cure for lymphedema, the goal of this non-invasive therapy is to reduce the swelling and to maintain the reduction. CDT shows good long-term results and includes four components:

1. ***Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD):*** This gentle hands-on treatment increases the activity of lymphatics and manually moves interstitial fluid.
2. ***Compression Therapy:*** the elastic fibers in the skin are damaged in lymphedema. To prevent reaccumulating fluid it is necessary to apply sufficient compression with short stretch bandages and garments. Compression therapy improves the function of the muscle pumps, helps to reduce fibrotic tissue and promotes venous and lymphatic return.
3. ***Exercises:*** a gentle exercise program is essential to activate joint and muscle pumps.
4. ***Skin care:*** the skin in lymphedema is susceptible to infections. A low-pH lotion, free of alcohol and fragrances should be used to maintain the moisture of the skin and to avoid infections.

Courtesy of Academy of Lymphatic Studies and Zuther, J. E. (2009). *Lymphedema Management: The comprehensive guide for practitioners*. 2nd Edition. Thieme: Stuttgart.

Lymphatic system overview, education, deep breathing, effleurage (less than 8 minutes)

<https://bit.ly/LymphOverview>

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