

Our Mission:

To improve a patient's quality of life by fostering the ability to manage lymphedema on a day-to-day basis by providing the skills and education needed to perform self-therapy.

Summa's Lymphedema Center
(330) 379-9643 or (800) 398-5934



What is lymphedema?

Lymphedema is the accumulation of lymphatic fluid in a body compartment such as the arm, leg or trunk. It is caused by a person's lymphatic system failing to work correctly and can lead to swelling in the affected area of the body. When working properly, the lymphatic system (as part of the immune system) removes debris, bacteria and excess protein from tissues in the body and produces lymphocytes to help the body fight harmful bacteria and infection. In lymphedema patients, this cleansing mechanism does not function.

What triggers the onset of lymphedema?

Primary lymphedema develops for no determined reason. A child may be born with the condition, or it may develop later in life. This form of lymphedema is more common in women and generally affects the legs.

Secondary lymphedema develops as the result of damage to the lymphatic system. This may result from trauma, surgery, radiation, cancer, infection or scarring.

What are the symptoms of lymphedema?

Although lymphedema generally affects the extremities, it can develop in any part of the body.

Warning signs include:

- ◆ a "full" or heavy sensation in the limbs;
- ◆ tight feeling of the skin;
- ◆ decreased flexibility in the hand, wrist, leg or ankle;
- ◆ difficulty fitting into clothing in one specific area; and
- ◆ persistent swelling.

Comprehensive decongestive therapy

Comprehensive or complex decongestive therapy (CDT) originated in Europe in the 1940s. CDT is a painless procedure comprised of:

- ◆ **compression bandaging**, a unique method that incorporates special bandages, distinctive wrapping and applied pressure;
- ◆ **manual lymphatic drainage**, a specialized type of massage designed to stimulate contraction of inactive lymphatic channels; and
- ◆ **an exercise regime coupled with patient education**, which often includes family members being instructed in daily management techniques.

How long does therapy last?

The duration depends upon the severity of symptoms. Generally, treatments average one to three weeks in duration, although more severe cases may require a commitment of six months to one

year. Initially, therapy is administered in 90-minute increments, Monday through Friday. As the condition is brought under control, the frequency of therapy may taper off. When possible, instruction is also provided to family members on CDT techniques to help the patient manage lymphedema on a day-to-day basis.

Summa's Support Group

Summa's Lymphedema Center encourages all lymphedema sufferers, regardless of whether they have received treatment at Summa or not, to attend the center's active support group. Because lymphedema affects a person's entire life, the group is especially helpful in providing education, support and encouragement to all attendees. A registered nurse facilitates the meeting, which is held the third Tuesday of each month at St. Thomas Hospital.

For information about the next support group meeting, please call
(330) 379-9643 or
(800) 395-5934.

