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SUMMA HEALTH SYSTEM

LYMPHEDEMA CENTER

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Summa's Lymphedema Center, which was established in July 1997, is one of only two such physician-run programs in Ohio. A physician and a team of trained occupational therapists and physical therapists specialize in providing comprehensive decongestive therapy (CDT), the latest in lymphedema treatment.

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;