



Surgical Associates
Division Pink

LYMPHEDEMA AFTER BREAST SURGERY

What is lymphedema?

Lymphedema is swelling. It happens because lymphatic fluid accumulates. It may happen when samples of the lymph nodes are removed during surgery or from radiation. Your chest, breast, or arm may swell. It can happen soon after breast surgery or radiation. It may even happen 10 or 20 years later.

Can I prevent lymphedema?

We are not sure how to prevent lymphedema. We are still not sure why some people get it, while others do not. However, the start of lymphedema may be related to certain activities. You may help to prevent lymphedema by avoiding those activities.

What should I avoid?

- 1. Do not lift heavy things**
 - ♦ Do not lift things heavier than 15 pounds. It's best to lift only lighter things.
- 2. Do not carry bags or luggage over your shoulder.**
- 3. Do not do tasks with a lot of arm movements**
 - ♦ Avoid tasks that involve vigorous arm movements. For example, mopping, vacuuming, weight lifting and using machines at the gym.
 - ♦ Ask your nurse or doctor about your work and exercise activities.
- 4. Do not have any tightness around your arm, hands or fingers**
 - ♦ Do not wear tight jewelry or elastics around your fingers or arms. For example, rings, bracelets, pony elastics, rubber bands and tight sleeves.

Remember: do not have blood pressure taken or injections on the side of surgery.

- 5. Avoid extreme heat.**
 - ♦ Do not use hot tubs, saunas or steam rooms.
- 6. Avoid cuts, insect bites and injuries to your arm. These can cause infections to your at risk arm.**
 - ♦ Wear gloves when you garden or do other work with your hands.
 - ♦ Do not cut your cuticles.
 - ♦ If you shave your armpits, use an electric razor. Shave carefully to avoid cuts.
 - ♦ If you notice a red or warm area, call your doctor or nurse IMMEDIATELY.

How will I know if I have lymphedema?

Some early signs of lymphedema can be:

- ♦ A sensation of heaviness or fatigue in the arm.
- ♦ Sleeves, bra or jewelry feeling tighter than usual.
- ♦ Any red or warm area.

If you notice any of these early signs, IMMEDIATELY call your doctor or nurse.

Lymphedema CAN BE TREATED.