

EXERCISE PRECAUTIONS FOR LYMPHEDEMA

Exercise is an important part of lymphedema treatment; it helps maintain healthy body weight, increases range of motion and flexibility, and improves muscle tone which helps increase lymphatic flow. Muscle contractions are the primary movers of the lymph fluid and must be strong to have a good lymph pump.

COMPRESSION GARMENTS MUST BE WORN DURING EXERCISES!

We recommend exercising 15-20 minutes per day, and all exercises are to be done slowly and without jerky movements. If you have been instructed in MLD, perform your deep abdominal breathing as instructed by your therapist prior to starting any exercise.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR PATIENTS AT RISK FOR UPPER EXTREMITY LYMPHEDEMA:

1. If you are starting a new exercise program, start with only very little weight. If you are resuming an exercise program, start with what is comfortable for you, and slowly increase over time.
2. Pay close attention to any swelling that may begin. You may need to level off the weight at a lower level sometimes increasing weight too quickly can cause swelling.
3. Alternate muscle groups during exercise. Do not do multiple sets incorporating the same muscle group. Think opposites to allow time for the muscle group to rest and fluid to move out of the affected arm.
4. Do not fatigue or strain the affected extremity as this could cause a local inflammation to occur and the arm to swell. This can compromise the lymph system and cause an exacerbation of lymphedema.
5. Do fewer repetitions of the affected side. Gradually add repetitions to increase tone over time.
6. Be easy on yourself! If you are used to working out at a higher level, you still may be able to achieve that over time....but going slowly will decrease your risk of any swelling.
7. Movements should be smooth and not jerky.
8. If you feel dizziness, shortness of breath, or any other unusual symptoms, **STOP IMMEDIATELY.**
9. If anything causes pain, **STOP.** Do not try and “work it out.”

Exercise is a very important component of lymphedema management. Your muscles move your lymph fluid. So keeping them tone and working will help prevention! Remember: prevention first!

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