

Things to Avoid

Try to avoid insect bites, cuts and scratches. While gardening use gloves. If for any reason the skin on your arm is broken, ensure it is kept clean and heals quickly.

Try to avoid prolonged heat and sunburn as this may increase lymphoedema.

See your doctor immediately if you have any: **pain, redness or heat in your arm; or if you notice any red lines tracking along the limb.**

If you are concerned at all please contact your breast care nurse and she will be able to refer you to the lymphoedema physiotherapist to help with any concerns.

Contact Us

Canterbury Breastcare

Level 2 Leinster Chambers

249 Papanui Road

Christchurch

8014

033 3551194

Lymphoedema in Breast Surgery



What is Lymphoedma?

The lymphatic system is made up of a network of vessels and lymph nodes (glands) which pass through almost all of our body. These vessels contain lymphatic fluid which is made up of a variety of substances such as protein, salt, fat, water, glucose and white blood cells which our bodies use to help fight infection. This fluid is filtered through our lymph nodes (glands) and if there is an infection or cancer cells present then our lymph nodes will swell.

Following your breast cancer surgery you may be at risk of developing lymphoedema.

Lymphoedema is a swelling of the arm, wrist and or hand. This is due to the disruption of the lymphatic system following surgery.

During surgery some of the lymph nodes will be removed, either by a sentinel node biopsy (1-4 nodes) or an axillary node clearance with the majority of the nodes removed (all of the lymph nodes below the axillary vein). Most people who have axillary surgery will not develop lymphoedema and for those who do develop lymphoedema the symptoms are often mild. Lymphoedema can occur shortly after surgery or years later.

Lymphoedema is not curable however in most cases it can be controlled with treatment. These treatments may include, massage, exercise, skin care and compression.

How to Control Lymphoedema

Healthy weight: Try to maintain a healthy weight. Being a healthy weight can make lymphoedema easier to control. Make sure you eat a healthy balanced diet which is low in fat and high in fibre. A low protein diet may worsen lymphoedema as low protein will take fluid from your bloodstream and leak this fluid into your tissues.

Exercise: Regular exercise such as swimming and aquacise can be very good for you as this action will help to move the fluid out of the swollen arm. St Georges Cancer Care provide physiotherapy and exercise sessions for patients who have had breast cancer. This can be of benefit for all patients no matter your fitness level.

Massage: Massage will help to move the lymph fluid from your arm and recirculate this fluid around your body. Your breast nurse will refer you to a lymphoedema physiotherapist who can teach you the correct way to self-massage.

Compression: Compression garments should be fitted correctly by a lymphoedema physiotherapist and should be worn according to their recommendations.

Skin care: Good skin care can help reduce your risk of lymphoedema. Moisturise daily. When you do this, massage the cream from your hand **up** your arm and across your chest, not down your arm as this may cause fluid to collect in your hand.

