

Lymphedema

What is lymphedema?

- Lymphedema is a chronic, protein rich swelling
- It can occur anywhere in the body



What is the lymphatic system and what does it do?

- The lymphatic system is composed of lymphatic vessels and lymph nodes that carry waste products/toxins from the tissues throughout the body
- Lymph fluid is moved from the lymphatic system into the blood stream, filtered through the kidneys and cleared from the body via urination
- The lymphatic system is part of the immune system. The lymphatic system removes waste products from the tissues and transports the waste products for removal from the body. If the lymphatic system is backed up creating lymph stasis there is increased risk for tissue damage and infection.



What causes lymphedema?

- Damage, infection or abnormal development of the lymphatic system
- Damage can result from surgical trauma (scars, lymph node removal), radiation or trauma due to injury

What are the different types of lymphedema?

- Primary lymphedema - develops due to damage to the lymphatic system
- Secondary lymphedema - develops due to damage to the lymphatic system

What are the risks of lymphedema?

- Infection - infection can occur if lymphedema is not treated due to stasis of the lymphatic fluid creating risk for cellulitis
- Wounds - stasis of lymphatic fluid can lead to blisters and sores
- Poor healing - lymph stasis limits tissue healing if lymphedema is not treated

How is lymphedema treated?

- Certified Lymphedema Therapists (CLTs) are therapists who are specially trained to treat issues with the lymphatic system
- Treatment consists of manual lymphatic drainage, complete decongestive therapy (compression bandaging with short stretch compression bandages), patient education (regarding skin care, use of compression etc), and exercises as indicated
- Compression devices (compression garments, compression pumps, nighttime garments)



If you have questions regarding lymphedema treatment at Primary Therapy Source, please contact Teresa Prine, MSPT, PCS, CLT at tprine@primarytherapysource.com



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