

# LIVING WITH LYMPHOEDEMA REDUCING THE RISK

## • • • ARM • • •

As a side effect of your cancer treatment your lymphatic system is weakened. This puts you at risk of developing a swelling and/or infection in or around the area that has been treated. This swelling is called lymphoedema and could occur any time after your treatment - even months or years later.

### **There are things that can increase this risk which you may want to avoid or be careful of:**

- Blood pressure monitoring on the treated side
- Needles/injection/taking blood on the treated side
- Application of perfumed/coloured products to the skin on/around the treated side
- Carrying heavy bags with the treated side
- Hot saunas/steam rooms/very hot baths
- Start any new exercise gently and gradually build up
- Sunburn - use at least SPF 30 to avoid sunburn
- Wet shaving - use an electric shaver if possible

### **Looking after your skin and fingernails:**

- Moisturising helps to keep your skin in good condition. Try and use a non perfumed moisturiser daily. These are available on prescription - please ask your lymphoedema clinician or GP.
- Avoid washing with soap as this dries the skin, swap for a non-perfumed moisturising wash.
- Treat any cuts/bites/scratches to the treated area with an antiseptic cream, cover with a plaster if weeping and look out for signs of infection (redness/heat/pain). Seek medical attention if concerned.
- Consider filing nails as an alternative to cutting them.

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## Top Tips

- Wearing a good supportive bra with deep sides can help reduce breast swelling and swelling to the side of the chest under the armpit.
- Movement and gentle exercise keeps fluid on the move so try to do some form of exercise every day. Even moving your arms while sat in the chair and doing some deep breathing helps.
- Don't reduce the amount of fluid you drink. General advice is to drink 1.5 - 2 litres of fluid every day to keep the body healthy.
- Try and maintain a healthy weight and healthy diet - we all should be doing this to avoid health problems.

## What to look out for

- Signs of swelling in the fingers/hand/arm/breast on the treated side. Rings/watch/bracelets may feel tighter than usual.
- Feeling of heaviness/aching/tightness to arm/breast on the treated side.
- Recurrent infections (cellulitis) to arm/breast on the treated side. Cellulitis is an infection within the skin. It may present as a red/deep pink area which feels hot and tender to touch, it may present as a rash or feel like prickly heat. You may have flu like symptoms leading up to this and during (feel shivery, tired, headache, sweat at night). The area is likely to look and feel swollen. Seek medical help immediately as you may need antibiotics.

## Please contact us if you have any concerns

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