What do you need to know?

WHAT IS LYMPHEDEMA?
Lymphedema refers to swelling of one or more limbs (arms/legs) and sometimes the neck and abdomen as well. It is most commonly caused by surgical procedures which remove the lymph nodes. e.g. Cancer treatment or conditions which may cause structural damage to the lymph nodes and vessels.

The Lymphatic system clears away infection and keeps your body fluids in balance. The system is made up of lymph (fluid) which has white blood cells which fight germs, lymph vessels which carry the lymph and lymph nodes which also aid in fighting infections.

SYMPTOMS:
- Swelling of your arms/legs including your fingers and toes
- Heaviness/tightness of the affected areas
- Restricted flexibility
- Aching/discomfort
- Recurrent infections
- Thickening and hardening of the skin

CAUSES:
Causes of lymphedema are either primary/secondary.
- Primary causes are rare and inherited.
- Secondary causes are procedures/conditions which may injure the lymph vessels/nodes. e.g. Surgery, infections, cancer.

RISK FACTORS:
- Age (can occur at any age, more common in older populations)
- Obesity/overweight
- Arthritis (Rheumatoid/ Psoriatic Arthritis)

Physiotherapy Relief!
Physiotherapy management has the greatest benefit once it is started early. The goal is to assist in improving function, help reduce pain and reduce your risk of infection.

- Therapeutic Massage
- Manual lymphatic drainage
- Skin Care
- Exercise

Your physiotherapist will assess you and based on your assessment provide you with exercises to assist your range of motion and strength. Therapeutic massage and drainage techniques are also used to decrease the severity of swelling experienced.

De-compressive stockings are also used in management to help with decreasing swelling and pain. There isn’t any cure for this condition and as such your physiotherapist will help teach you ways to control and manage your symptoms.

Prepared as a public service by the Physiotherapy Association of Trinidad and Tobago
Acknowledgement to Dr. Bianca Lutchman PT, DPT
Notes