

Body Weight

Maintain a normal body weight as being overweight is associated with increased severity of lymphedema symptoms. To date, there are no special dietary recommendations for lymphedema. Try to eat a balanced diet.

Self-measuring

Self-measuring is a quick and easy way to monitor a lymphedematous limb. Measure once a month if your lymphedema is stable and more frequently if it is variable. Keep a record of your measures. If your limb becomes more swollen and self-bandaging does not control the increase, consult your therapist. For more details, see www.infofolympo.ca

Exercise guidelines

- Begin or return to any exercise program with the approval of your physician and/or therapist.
- While studies have shown the benefit of exercise, everyone is different. Listen to your body and rest when necessary.
- Measure your limb once a month or before starting any new exercise activity.
- According to research, it is advisable to wear compression garments while exercising.
- Whether starting a new physical activity or returning to a previous exercise program, progress slowly, at your own pace and monitor carefully for changes in swelling.
- Swimming, water exercises, walking, gentle cycling, dance, light aerobics, gentle yoga and all are all beneficial activities for general health. Such activities are also encouraged during and after cancer treatments.
- Resistance exercises can begin once your therapist has defined your lymphedema as stable. Progress gradually with low weights and low repetitions; if possible, seek guidance from a trained professional.

Air travel recommendations

There is little research to determine whether lymphedema can be caused or aggravated by air travel. Nonetheless, experts advise wearing well-fitted compression garments and moving the affected limb as much as possible on flights.

LAQ MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION & DONATION FORM

Mailing address:
Lymphedema Association of Québec
CP 152
Succursale Bureau Chef
Saint-Hyacinthe, QC J2S 7B4
Phone: 514 979-2463 1-866-979-2463
www.infofolympo.ca
aql@infofolympo.ca

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

Postal Code: _____

Phone (daytime): _____

Phone (evening): _____

Email*: _____

Signature*: _____

*By providing us with your email address and signature, you consent to receiving emails from the LAQ, in accordance with Canada's Anti-Spam Law.

Become a Member!

I would like to become a member for an annual fee of:

- \$35 for regular members
 \$185 for therapist members
 \$500 for corporate members

Make a Donation!

- I would like to donate \$10
 I would like to donate \$25
 I would like to donate \$50
 I would like to donate \$100
 I would like to donate \$_____

LAQ is a registered charitable organization #81663 0644 RR0001. Charitable donation receipts will be issued for amounts of \$10 and above.

Thank you for your support!

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Other recommendations

- If possible avoid needle sticks, injections, blood tests and vaccination on the affected side.*
- Whenever possible, infusion lines and portacath should be on the non-affected side.*
- For lymphedema of the arm, wear a well-fitted bra with wide and flexible straps and well distributed support. Remove tight jewelry, watches and bracelets.
- For Lymphedema of the leg: wear comfortable stockings, tights and underwear without tight elastic band.
- Avoid prolonged exposure to high heat such as saunas, jacuzzis and overheated training rooms.
- When possible, avoid staying too long in the same position.

* There is no clear scientific evidence that these procedures lead to lymphedema. In the current state of knowledge, it is best to remain cautious.

A publication of



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Consult your therapist or www.infofolympo.ca for references and resources.

LIVING WELL WITH LYMPHEDEMA

TREATMENT, EXERCISE AND SELF-MANAGEMENT

Who are we?

The Lymphedema Association of Québec (LAQ) is a non-profit association established in 1999 in order to provide education and awareness about lymphedema, its causes, risk reduction strategies and treatments.

The association is comprised of individuals directly affected by lymphedema, their families, friends and health care professionals.



Association québécoise du lymphœdème
Lymphedema Association of Québec

About lymphedema

Lymphedema is swelling and inflammation due to abnormal buildup of fluid and protein in body tissues that can develop when the lymphatic system is improperly developed or damaged through trauma or injury. Often becoming a chronic condition, it occurs most frequently in the limbs but can affect other parts of the body.

About the lymphatic system

The lymphatic system plays an important role in the immune system and helps maintain the balance of fluids in the body. Lymph nodes filter out harmful cells for removal by the body's defense system. Lymph vessels carry lymph, composed of fluid, protein and cellular products, from body tissues back towards the heart. Lymph flow is aided by contraction of lymph vessels, muscle movement during exercise and deep breathing.

Types of Lymphedema

There are two main types of lymphedema: primary and secondary. Primary lymphedema, due to a congenital defect, appears at birth or later in life. Secondary lymphedema occurs when the lymphatic system is damaged as a result of trauma, surgery or radiation. It can be a side effect of cancer-related treatments that require the removal or irradiation of lymph nodes. Lymphedema may occur months or years after treatment. Lymphedema can also occur as a side effect of other conditions such as chronic venous insufficiency or severe obesity.

Lymphedema signs and symptoms

- Swelling, gradual or sudden, seen by indentation of the skin when pressed, or by tight clothing or jewelry;
- Feelings of heaviness, tightness;
- Achiness or bursting or shooting pain;
- Increased swelling on hot, humid days or after exertion.

Early diagnosis and treatment yield best results

Do not ignore symptoms. See your doctor or a specialized lymphedema therapist for an evaluation. Early treatment helps minimize swelling and reduce complications.

Complications of lymphedema if left untreated

- Infection, called cellulitis or erysipelas, is the greatest danger and requires urgent antibiotic treatment;
- Delayed wound healing;
- Skin and tissue hardening;
- Limited flexibility;

- Problems associated with lymphedema may lead to difficulty in carrying out daily tasks and to psychological distress.

Seek immediate medical treatment if you experience these signs of cellulitis:

- Red blotches, or itchy spreading rash;
- Increased swelling;
- Increased temperature of the skin;
- Sudden onset of high fever and chills.

Managing your lymphedema

Treatment goals are to reduce swelling by compression and to improve lymphatic drainage. Your therapist will evaluate the stage and severity of the lymphedema and consider your medical history before proposing an individual treatment plan. Learning how to manage your lymphedema through continuing self-care is vital to treatment success. Your therapist should provide education, tools and resources to guide you.

Lymphedema Treatment Options

Decongestive Lymphatic Therapy (DLT)

Decongestive lymphedema therapy (DLT) combines manual lymph drainage, multi-layer bandaging, remedial exercises, education in self-management (including self massage, selfbandaging and skin care), and compression garments. DLT is currently considered the most effective treatment available. Therapists are specifically trained and certified to practice DLT. See the LAQ Resource Guide, also available online at www.infolympo.ca. to find a therapist certified near you.

Manual lymph drainage (MLD)

Manual lymph drainage is a gentle massage. MLD stimulates lymph flow and redirects the lymph fluid to areas of the body where the lymphatic system is functioning. Special techniques help to break down hardened tissue.

Lymphedema multi-layer compression bandaging (LCB)

Multi-layer compression bandaging consists of application of several layers on the limb, including a liner, a layer of padding and compression bandages. Alternative systems from compression bandages to velcro are available.

LCB aids muscles in stimulating lymph flow and prevents reaccumulation of lymph. It can be worn 24 hours a day. LCB is applied by certified therapists. People living with Lymphedema, or their caregivers, should learn the method to apply these bandages

Remedial exercises

A certified Lymphedema health professional will tell you how to perform a series of remedial exercises that promote the decongestion of the affected limb.

Maintenance and self-management

Once Lymphedema stabilized thanks to the TLD (2 weeks or more), the therapist will show you the compression garment that is right for you and help you make the transition to self-management:

Compression garments

Compression garments stabilize swelling and are an essential part of long-term treatment. Garments must be prescribed by a doctor and fitted by a trained measurer. They can be off the shelf or custom-made, but they must always fit properly. Compression garments are worn during the day, especially during times of high activity. They must be removed at night. A variety of other non-elastic and limited elasticity compression products are available for night and day use. When waiting for a new compression garment to be delivered, it is recommended that you keep your lymphedema stable with self-bandaging. (see below).

Education for self-management

Lymphedema is a condition that requires daily care. You will learn from your therapist and/or support group how to manage it well. You will be introduced to self-bandaging to ensure your autonomy, self-massage (a simplified version of the MLD) and skin care.

Self-bandaging

In some cases, to maintain treatment results, your therapist will teach you self-bandaging. Your autonomy will be improved.

Self-massage

Your therapist will teach self-massage techniques to ensure a better circulation of the lymph.

Skin Care

- Careful attention to your skin is essential to reduce the risk of infection. Cleanse gently with mild soap. Dry thoroughly and apply a non-allergenic moisturizer to prevent chapping and chafing.
- Be vigilant about cuts, scratches, splinters and pinpricks. Use electric razors to avoid nicks and skin irritation.
- If a cut or scratch does occur, clean the wound with soap, apply disinfectant, and, if indicated, an antibiotic ointment. At the slightest sign of infection, consult a doctor immediately.

- Protect your skin with a high protection sunscreen to avoid sunburn, and use an insect repellent to avoid bites.

For arm lymphedema

- Protect your hands and nails. Do not cut cuticles.
- Inform your manicurist that you are at risk for lymphedema and that equipment must be properly sanitized.
- Consider wearing medical gloves to prepare food, rubber gloves for household chores, gardening gloves for outdoor tasks.

For leg lymphedema:

- Protect your feet and nails. Do not cut cuticles.
- Inform your pedicurist that you are at risk for lymphedema and that equipment must be properly sanitized.
- Avoid walking barefoot, and wear closed, well fitting shoes and comfortable hosiery.

Exercises/movement/deep breathing

If starting a new, or returning to a former, exercise program, follow the exercise guidelines set up in this pamphlet. Exercise, deep breathing and movement stimulate lymphatic flow. Mobility and activity are encouraged to maintain normal functioning during decongestive therapy and after. General exercise helps build strength, maintain joint mobility, promote healthy body weight, increase fitness and prevent injury. In general, be as active as you can.

Other treatments

Pneumatic pumps

Pneumatic pumps are sometimes used to treat lymphedema; however, they have the potential complication of pushing fluid upwards and causing swelling and hardened tissue above the treated area. Pumps are best used in conjunction with DLT and under the guidance of your therapist.

Diuretics

Diuretics are generally not recommended for the treatment of lymphedema because they remove water and increase the buildup of protein which can harden tissues and increase inflammation. However, you should remain on this medication if it is given for another health condition. Please discuss any questions with your doctor and see your therapist or visit the www.infolympo.ca for more resources and references.