

EXERCISES

These exercises will help lymphedema:

Assisted Shoulder Flexion

Starting position:

Lying down, holding a small stick with both hands.

With your elbows straight, lift the stick over your head as high and as far back behind your head as possible. Hold for a count of 3 to 5 seconds. Return your arms up with the stick over your chest. Relax.

Repeat _____ times.

Assisted External Rotation

Starting position:

Lying down, elbows bent to 90° and held next to your body, and grasping a stick.

Use your _____ arm to supply the power to push your _____ hand outward, keeping your elbows against your body. Relax.

Repeat _____ times.

Shoulder External Rotation

Starting position:

Sitting, standing or lying.

Clasp your hands together in front of you. Reach up over your head and place your hands down behind your neck. Spread your elbows as far as possible. Relax.

Repeat _____ times.

Wall Climbing Exercises

Starting position:

With your _____ arm, walk your two fingers up the wall, stepping closer to the wall as you climb higher; then slide down. Relax.

Repeat _____ times.

Pulley Exercise

Starting position:

Sitting or standing.

Grasping a pulley, pull your _____ arm down to help lift your other arm straight over your head. Relax.

Repeat _____ times.

Ball Squeeze

Starting position:

Lying on your back or sitting.

With your arm held out at shoulder height, elbow straight; squeeze ball. Repeat 10 times.

Shoulder Girdle Elevation

Starting position:

Sitting with your shoulders relaxed.

Slowly bring your shoulders up toward your ears. Hold for a count of 5, then slowly lower shoulders. Relax.

Repeat _____ times.

Shoulder Circles

Starting position:

Sitting with your shoulders relaxed.

Slowly roll your shoulders backward in a circular motion _____ times.

Shoulder Retraction

Starting position:

Sitting, shoulders relaxed.

Bring your shoulders back, trying to pinch your shoulder blades together. Hold for a count of 5. Relax.

Repeat _____ times.

KCBC

Knoxville Comprehensive Breast Center



Screening
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(865) 584-0291

Fax (865) 584-4426

Toll Free 1-800-456-8169

www.knoxvillebreastcenter.com

KCBC'S

BREAST HEALTH LIBRARY

LYMPHEDEMA



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The Knoxville Comprehensive Breast Center Breast Health Library has been designed to give you more information about breast health issues. If you have additional questions after you read this brochure, please be sure to ask a Breast Health Nurse Specialist.

Lymphedema (limf-i-dem'a) is a swelling of the tissues brought on by a variety of factors.

Lymphedema may be noticed after breast surgery. There are several reasons for this:

- 1) Infection to the arm, hand, or breast on the operative side.
- 2) Binding forces to the operative side.
- 3) Stress to the operative arm.

INFECTION

Infection is probably the best understood and most preventable cause of lymphedema. The lymph nodes that help control infection have been removed. If an infection begins in the hand, arm, or breast, on the operative side, the body sends cells and fluids to fight the infection. The system is already compromised because of the surgery and can no longer handle extra fluid and swelling begins in the arm. The swelling may be limited to certain areas of the arm, hand, or breast, or include the entire extremity.

Therefore, it is very important to prevent infection on the operative side.

As our skin is our protective covering, it is important to remember that any lesion (i.e. scratch, burn, insect bite, etc.) may allow infectious bacteria to enter the tissue. Therefore, any skin puncture risks introducing infection. The care of your hand and arm on the side of your surgery should include the following:

- ❖ Have injections, vaccinations, flu shots, blood drawings, and placement of IVs on the unaffected arm.
- ❖ Wear rubber gloves while doing housework which includes cleaning with harsh detergent, steel wool, etc.
- ❖ Wear protective gloves with other work that may result in even minor injuries, such as when cleaning out the basement or garage.
- ❖ Wear canvas gloves while doing yard work or gardening; be careful of thorns.
- ❖ Use an electric battery operated razor rather than a safety (straight) razor to remove hair under your arm. Do not use depilatory creams.
- ❖ Use a thimble when sewing by hand, avoid needle and pin pricks.

- ❖ Use an insect repellent, as necessary, to prevent insect bites. If you get stung by a bee, be sure the stinger is removed.
- ❖ Be careful of skin injuries when making crafts, using glue guns, etc.
- ❖ Wear elbow-length padded oven mitts when reaching into a hot oven or cooking on a grill. Do not reach over boiling pots or heated frying pans.
- ❖ Be careful of pet scratches.

How to care for lesions on your affected arm:

- ❖ Give the area immediate attention by washing the lesion with soap and water.
- ❖ Apply an over-the-counter antiseptic cream, such as Neosporin or Bacitracin, to the area and cover with a clean bandage.
- ❖ Apply a cold pack or cold water to burns for 10-15 minutes; then wash with soap and water and apply a clean bandage.
- ❖ Watch for signs of infection: swelling, redness, tenderness, increased heat, hardness.

Notify your doctor immediately if:

- ❖ Any part of your affected arm or axilla looks reddened, feels hot, or has increased swelling.
- ❖ You develop a temperature over 100°F (38.3°C).

BINDING

Any binding force to the affected extremity may interrupt the flow of circulation and worsen an already compromised circulation system. Try to follow these basic guidelines:

- ❖ Have blood pressures checked only on the unaffected extremity.
- ❖ Do not wear tight jewelry or tight fitting sleeves on the affected arm.
- ❖ Avoid tight bra straps.
- ❖ Avoid a prosthesis that is too heavy.

STRESS

Stress may put a strain on the arm with an already compromised circulation. Try to follow these basic guidelines:

- ❖ Avoid heavy lifting with your affected arm - particularly with your arm in a dependent position.
- ❖ Use your unaffected arm or both arms to carry your purse, grocery bags, packages, or any other heavy loads. Do not carry over-the-shoulder purses on your affected side.
- ❖ Avoid lifting a heavy briefcase or suitcase with your affected arm.

- ❖ Avoid moving heavy furniture.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Skin and Nail Care

- ❖ Maintain good hygiene by keeping skin clean and dry with hypoallergenic soap and deodorant. This will protect skin from irritation and possible infection.
- ❖ Avoid extreme temperature changes in bathing and washing dishes. Heat increases blood flow through the tissue. Sudden temperature changes cause undue stress on the compromised system.
- ❖ Avoid a sunburn.
- ❖ Do not pick or cut cuticles. Soak your hands and gently press the cuticles back with a cuticle stick.
- ❖ Do not pull hangnails; cut them without breaking the skin.

Diet

Maintain your ideal body weight through a well-balanced diet. This will avoid adding excess weight or fluid to the limbs.

- ❖ Try to maintain a diet high in fiber and bran and low in fat. Eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables. Avoid fried foods.
- ❖ Maintain a low salt diet.
- ❖ Drink a lot of water.
- ❖ Avoid smoking and excess alcohol.

Exercise and Activity

- ❖ Avoid vigorous, repetitive movements against resistance with the affected arm. Physical exertion causes the blood to flow more rapidly through the arm and tissue, further damaging an already compromised system.
- ❖ Consult your doctor or physical therapist about any sports activities in which you participate. Some sports may aggravate the condition. Physical exertion forces the compromised lymphatic system to try to do work that it cannot do. Exercises such as swimming, bike riding, walking, specially designed ballet or yoga movements are advised.