Comprehensive Personal Treatment

Lymphedema is an abnormal swelling in a body part due to an accumulation of lymph fluid. Swelling is usually in an arm or leg, but can also occur in the face, neck, trunk, pelvis or groin. One arm or leg may feel “heavier” than the other, accompanied by a feeling of tightness of the skin, often more noticeable at the elbow or knee.

There are two kinds of Lymphedema:

Primary lymphedema: a congenital condition where body part swells due to the absence or malformation of lymph vessels. Swelling may begin at birth or it may not occur until adolescence or even into adulthood.

Secondary lymphedema: a body part swells due to disease or surgery that changes or removes the lymph nodes or vessels. It may occur as a result of surgery and/or radiation of the lymph nodes of the neck, axilla (armpit), abdomen, pelvis or groin, or from trauma or chronic infection.

Can lymphedema be cured?
Lymphedema is not curable, but with proper instruction can be managed effectively. The key to good control is prompt identification and treatment.
What is the Lymphatic System?
The lymphatic system is an intricate network of vessels that carries lymph fluid containing bacteria, viruses, and cell waste products from tissues to the lymph nodes. The lymph nodes filter out what is not necessary, then return the remaining fluid to the blood system.

Why should lymphedema be managed?
Lymphedema can decrease mobility and is sometimes painful. Lymphedema management takes less time, energy and money if treated in the early stages. If lymphedema is not treated, the swelling can increase and repeated infections may occur. When lymphedema advances, the skin begins to harden and thicken and lymph fluid may begin to leak through the skin leading to more infection.

How can lymphedema be managed?
Lymphedema can be managed through Complete Decongestive Therapy (CDT). CDT is a two-phase, four-step program. Phase One is designed to reduce the swelling. Phase Two focuses on maintenance through a home program.

Phase One daily treatment program consists of the following:
**Meticulous skin care:** patients are taught good skin hygiene. Bacterial and fungal growth can lead to infections such as cellulitis or lymphangitis and prevent limb reduction. Good skin care reduces the chance of infection.

**Manual lymphatic drainage (MLD):** a specialized manual treatment that facilitates the movement of lymph fluid into the blood system. This technique works to create new pathways for increasing lymphatic drainage.

**Compression bandaging:** short-stretch compression bandages are used to increase tissue pressure which aids in the movement of lymph fluid. Bandages along with various foam products work to break up tissue that has hardened due to scarring and fibrosis. Bandages are applied after MLD.

**Remedial exercises:** performed with the bandages or compression garment on to improve lymph circulation. Breathing exercises are utilized to increase the amount of fluid that is moved.

Phase two begins when the limb swelling becomes stable.
The patient is educated on self-care at home: meticulous skin care, self-MLD, as needed, remedial exercise, and compression bandaging and compression garments.

How can I begin treatment for lymphedema?
If signs and symptoms are present, seek medical advice. If Complete Decongestive Therapy is determined to be needed, a prescription for CDT is required. Our licensed occupational or physical therapists certified in Complete Decongestive Therapy will establish your treatment program.

Location
The IU Health Ball Memorial Hospital Rehabilitation Lymphedema Clinic is located at IU Health Ball Memorial Hospital in the Rehabilitation Services Department on 4 West. For more information about the Lymphedema Clinic call 765.747.3239 today.

Ball Memorial Hospital
Rehabilitation Center

Discover the strength at iuhealth.org/ball-memorial
Follow us on twitter at @IUHealthBall
Like us on Facebook.com/IUHealthBall

© 2013 Indiana University Health 03/08/13

2401 W. University Avenue Muncie, IN 47303 T 765.747.3239