

Tips

Physiotherapy for lymph drainage

Physiotherapy relieves existing lymphoedema; your physiotherapist will give you all the advice. Ask your treatment team for a recommendation.

Normal body weight

Try to ensure you maintain normal body weight. Your body mass index (BMI) is a value that is calculated from your height and weight.

- [«Calculate Your BMI»](#)

A BMI above 30 increases the risk of lymphoedema.

In the case of existing lymphoedema

Ask your doctor whether you should carry antibiotics on you, so that you can start treatment immediately if you notice signs of an infection. Ask your treatment team whether you should wear a compression bandage on your arm for a long plane journey.

Further information on the topic

- [«Understanding Lymphoedema»](#) (Cancer Council Australia, 2023) – Fact sheet on lymphoedema, its causes, risk factors, and practical tips
- [«Living Well After Cancer»](#) (Cancer Council Australia, 2024) – Guide with advice on lifestyle, nutrition, physical activity, and coping strategies to help people live well during and after cancer treatment



Upper body lymphoedema

Good to know

In cancer surgery (e.g. for breast cancer), lymph nodes in the armpits sometimes have to be removed. This can lead to the development of lymphoedema at the ribcage and on the arms.

Lymph is a component of the body's defences (immune system). Lymph flows freely between the cells. If the lymph fails to drain away, swelling occurs, which is called oedema.

You can recognise lymphoedema by a dent that is left when you press on the swelling with your finger. Lymphoedema also leads to changes such as pain or tightness of the skin at the following sites on the body:




- Arms
- Trunk and chest

The earlier lymphoedema is recognised, the easier it is to treat effectively

Lymphoedema cannot be cured, only relieved. Lymphoedema increases the risk of inflammation if the skin of the affected area of the body is injured.

About one in five patients with breast cancer develops lymphoedema after treatment. If several lymph nodes have been removed in an operation, the risk of lymphoedema is increased for a very long time.

Upper body lymphoedema

You feel...	Or you notice...	What you can do for yourself...
	<p>You have previously had the following treatments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lymph node removal • Radiotherapy in the region of the breast or armpit • Cancer treatments (e.g. chemotherapy or antibody therapy) <p>You have other risk factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diabetes mellitus • Overweight <p>If this applies to you, you have an increased risk of developing lymphoedema. However, despite the increased risk, you are not noticing any signs or symptoms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move your arm the way you did before the treatment. Movements should not trigger any pain. • Observe your skin. Dry yourself carefully between your fingers and in the skin folds. Use a skin lotion. Beobachten Sie Ihre Haut. • Protect yourself against injuries. Be careful with your nail care and wear gloves to protect your hands from injuries. • Avoid intense heat, sunburn and insect bites. Wear protective clothing and use sunscreens and insect repellents. • Avoid constrictive clothing in the affected area of the body. • Try to ensure you maintain normal body weight with suitable exercise. • Avoid injections into or blood pressure measurements on the affected arm.
	<p>You are noticing any of the following changes to the affected arm or on the trunk or ribcage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cracks in the skin or other injuries • a feeling of tightness or heaviness • slight swelling • skin changes such as thickening, wrinkles, or colour changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disinfect the cuts or scratches on the affected area of the body. If you notice signs of inflammation (redness, heat), inform the treatment team. • Avoid saunas, baths hotter than 34 °C and intensive sunbathing. • In the case of swelling, elevate the arm (above the height of the heart) and contact the treatment team.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapid worsening of the symptoms listed in the yellow section • Overheating and/or redness of the body area • Simultaneous occurrence of fever above 38 °C and swelling or injury on the arm, trunk or chest • Pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the treatment team.