

Lymphedema Risk Reduction

Following Surgery

Surgery and radiation are often necessary for appropriate breast cancer treatment, but some treatments carry a risk that swelling- called *lymphedema*- could develop in the hand, arm, or breast on the treated side. Most people do not get Lymphedema. For those who do, it could happen immediately after surgery or much later down the road. Research suggests that in order to reduce your lymphedema risk, you should:

- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Exercise within your level of comfort when medically cleared

Promptly speak with your doctor if you notice any of the following symptoms:

- Increased swelling and/or redness to the affected side
- Decreased ability to locate/feel the bony structures of the hand and/or arm (knuckles, wrist bone, elbow)
- Tightness of rings, bracelets, or other jewelry on the affected side

The following risk factors could increase your risk of developing Lymphedema:

- Full Axillary Lymph Node Dissection (ALND)
- Radiation to the lymph node areas
- Body Mass Index (BMI) greater than or equal to 25 lb/in²

Organizations, such as the [American Cancer Society](#) and the [National Lymphedema Network](#), advise survivors to avoid blood pressure and needle sticks on the surgery side, **if possible**. To date, there is not good research to support this recommendation and several studies have found it has no effect on arm swelling. Use of the surgical arm can be used if and when needed being mindful of the above signs and symptoms.

Compression is used to reduce lymphedema symptoms. Please speak with your doctor to discuss if/when compression garments are appropriate for you. As always, remember to keep skin clean. If you notice a cut or break in the skin, wash the area thoroughly with soap and water, apply a topical antibacterial ointment, cover it with a bandage, and watch for signs of infection, such as redness, swelling, warmth in the area, or fever.