



Lymphedema Program

Rehabilitation Services
Lymphedema Program
1500 San Pablo Street
3rd Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90033
(323) 442-8850

What is Lymphedema?

Lymphedema is an abnormal accumulation of protein-rich fluid in the interstitium which causes chronic inflammation and reactive fibrosis of the affected tissues. The swelling can occur in one or more of the extremities, face, head and neck, abdomen or genitals.

Classification

Primary Lymphedema: Is the result of lymphatic dysplasia. May be present at birth, but more often it develops later in life without obvious cause.

Secondary Lymphedema: Is much more common and can be the result of surgery, a side effect of radiation, or any other cause which results in significant trauma to the lymphatic system some of which are cancer, obesity, chronic venous insufficiency, and infection.

Stages of Lymphedema:

Latency stage:

- No visible/ palpable edema
- Transport capacity reduced
- Subjective complaints - feeling of heaviness in the arm

Stage I: Reversible Lymphedema

- Accumulation of protein-rich fluid
- Pitting edema
- Decreases with elevation (no fibrosis)

Stage II: Spontaneous Irreversible Lymphedema

- Accumulation of protein-rich fluid
- Pitting becomes progressively more dense
- Fibrotic

Stage III: Lymphostatic Elephantiasis

- Accumulation of protein-rich fluid
- Non pitting
- Fibrotic and sclerotic
- Skin changes-papillomas, hyper-keratosis etc.

Treatment

Lymphedema treatment can be provided by either an Occupational Therapist or a Physical Therapist certified in Complete Decongestion Therapy. This is a non-invasive approach that includes two phases of treatment:

Phase I – Intensive Phase

- Meticulous skin and nail care
- Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD)
- Compression bandaging
- Remedial exercises
- Education in self care techniques
- Education in self management of lymphedema

Phase II – Maintenance Phase

Patient is independent with the following:

- Donning/Doffing of compression garment
- Continued skin care
- Remedial exercises
- Self MLD as needed
- Follow-up visits

USCUH Lymphedema

Program specializes in:

- Primary Congenital Lymphedema
- Secondary Lymphedema due to cancer, surgery, and/or radiation treatment
- Phlebo-Lymphedema combination of chronic venous insufficiency & lymphostasis
- Head & Neck Cancer – post surgical lymphedema

- Lipo Lymphedema

Reference: Logo from Textbook of
Lymphology by Foldi

For information about lymphedema treatment

Please contact:

USC University Hospital
Occupational Therapy
1500 San Pablo Street,
3rd Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90033
(323) 442-8850

Referral Process

Fax the following to
323-442-8528:

- Physician order for
“Occupational Therapy for
management of
lymphedema”
- Recent History & Physical
- Medical Insurance
Information

Evaluation and Course of Treatment

Once the patient is evaluated the initial evaluation and treatment plan will be faxed to the referring physician. During the course of treatment, any changes in the treatment plan will also be faxed to the physician. The treatment plan must be signed by the physician and faxed back within 24 hours to assure initiation and continuation of treatment. Therapy cannot begin or continue without the approval and signature of the physician.