SKIN CARE FOLLOWING CANCER TREATMENT

Keeping a lymphedema limb well moisturized is an important component in the management of lymphedema and the prevention of infection.

Dry skin can lead to breaks which provide an opening for bacteria to enter the body. In addition, accumulation of fluid in a body part (lymphedema) is an ideal environment for bacteria to grow and infection to develop.

Therefore, the first defense against infection is to keep the skin well moisturized. This means applying lotion daily and inspecting the lymphedema limb for dry areas, cuts, scratches and redness. The next step is to minimize the chance of cutting or scratching the lymphedema limb during daily activities and recreational activities.

**General suggestions for reducing the risk of infection**

- Avoid getting sunburned. Wear sun resistant clothing, long-sleeve shirts or pants during times of prolonged sun exposure.
- Minimize exposure to insect bites. Wear long-sleeve shirts and pants when working in the yard, hiking or walking in a park. Carefully choose insect repellents if applying directly on the skin (avoid harsh chemicals) and consider spraying clothing with insect repellent.
- Proper fitting clothes and shoes are important. Tight clothing or shoes can restrict lymph flow which may result in an increase in swelling of the lymphedema limb. Sandals with tight straps can also cause significant restrictions in lymph flow in your feet. Make sure that your bra straps are not too tight. Thicker straps are better for avoiding lymph flow restrictions.
- Use care with shaving. Use an electric razor if possible.
- Avoid hot tubs and saunas because the increase in your body temperature may cause overload to your lymph system and induce swelling. Avoid using heating pads and hot packs, especially over the areas where you have lymphedema.
- Check ingredients with body and face lotions. Most contain alcohol which can by drying to the skin. Avoid scented lotions which may cause skin irritation.

**Suggestions for reducing the risk of infection in head and neck lymphedema**

- Don’t squeeze or scratch facial acne.
- Be careful with facial cleansers, masks, peels, and aftershaves. These all have harsh ingredients which harm and damage your skin. Use a hypo-allergenic product if possible.
Suggestions for reducing the risk of infection with **arm lymphedema**

- Whenever possible, avoid taking blood pressure, blood draws, and receiving injections in the affected limb.
- Be careful when working around fire, stoves, ovens, boiling water, heaters, etc. The goal is to reduce the chance of a burn to the limb with lymphedema. If cooking, use oven mitts that extend all the way to the elbow. This will protect the lymphedema limb when using the oven and stove. Check the temperature of water with the uninvolved limb.
- If using household chemicals for cleaning or working in the yard, car, etc., wear gloves to avoid direct skin contact with harsh chemicals. If working in the garden, gloves will aide in avoiding cuts and scratches.
- Use a thimble when sewing or during needlepoint activities.
- Be careful with manicures. It is important maintain good fingernail and cuticle integrity; however, the fingernail bed can be cut during a manicure. Ensure that all instruments are sterilized at your nail salon.
- Be careful when wearing jewelry on the affected limb. Whether wearing rings on the affected fingers, the lymphedema can increase making it impossible to remove the rings.

Suggestions for reducing the risk of infection with **leg lymphedema**

- Be careful when working around fire, stoves, ovens, boiling water, heaters, etc. Check the temperature of water with the uninvolved limb.
- Avoid walking barefoot in the home or outside and especially in public pools and bathrooms. If involved in a swimming program, you may consider purchasing “aqua shoes”.
- Be careful with pedicures. It is important maintain good fingernail and cuticle integrity; however, the fingernail bed can be cut during a pedicure. Ensure that all instruments are sterilized at your nail salon.
- Consider seeing a podiatrist for toe nail care if you have leg lymphedema.
- If you have athlete’s foot or a fungal infection, seek medical attention. Both may contribute to an increase in lymphedema and may increase the risk of infection.
- Do a visual check of your feet for areas irritation or rubbing. It is important to avoid blisters with proper fitting shoes
- Check your shoes for pebbles because they can cause skin irritation or blisters.
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Signs and symptoms of infection

- Fever, fatigue and/or flu-like symptoms
- Redness or red streaks on skin
- Increased temperature of skin
- Increased pain
- Enlarged lymph nodes

What to do in the case of an infection

- **Seek medical attention immediately! Do not wait.**