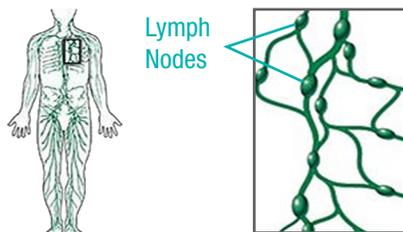


The Lymphatic System

Lymph is a colourless fluid which forms in the body and normally drains back into the blood circulation through a network of lymph vessels and lymph nodes. The lymphatic system plays an important part in the body's defense against infection.



How Lymphedema Occurs

If the drainage routes through the lymphatic system become blocked or damaged, lymph accumulates in the tissues and swelling occurs. Unlike other edemas, lymphedema leads to changes in the tissues, such as fibrosis and an increased risk of infection. The swelling can then become even more difficult to control.

Cancer treatment is the leading cause of lymphedema in Canada

Types of Lymphedema

Primary lymphedema develops as a result of a malfunctioning lymphatic system, usually as a result of genetic underdevelopment.

Secondary lymphedema is the result of damage to lymphatic pathways. This may be a result of treatment for cancer following surgery or radiation therapy.

Lymphedema can also occur as a result of infection, severe injury, burns, or any other trauma or surgery that causes damage to the lymphatic nodes and vessels.

Lymphedema affects all ages and may occur months/years after surgery, so it is important to understand and manage the life-long risk.

Help Us Help You

The Lymphedema Association of Ontario (LAO) relies on memberships and donations to continue its work to promote awareness and education for lymphedema patients, those at risk and health care professionals.

Become a Member or Donate

Please go to www.lymphontario.ca to become a member or to donate. Memberships include:

- an annual subscription to *Pathways*, Canada's National Lymphedema Quarterly Magazine, including our *Lymphedema Matters* regional newsletter insert, with up-to-date lymphedema information, research and human interest stories
- advanced notifications and discounts to LAO events
- invitation to the LAO Annual General Meeting (AGM)
- options for Professional and Corporate Members to list on our website and in our *Pathways Magazine* newsletter insert

Please consult our website for full membership details.

Visit our website or contact us for more information on lymphedema and to find resources in Ontario including a directory of CDT certified lymphedema professionals



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Lymphedema is chronic swelling of a body part caused by an accumulation of lymph fluid

If you have had cancer treatment including surgery or radiation affecting lymph nodes you are at a lifetime risk



Committed to improving the lives of people living with lymphedema

LYMPHEDEMA

Lymphedema Symptoms

The signs and symptoms for lymphedema may include:

- A full or heavy feeling in the affected limb
- A feeling of tightness in the skin
- Less movement or flexibility in the hand, wrist, shoulder or ankle
- Clothing or jewelry feels tight in one specific area
- Abnormal swelling in the affected area

Unfortunately, some people are told that nothing can be done to help. Many doctors are either not knowledgeable or are unaware of where to refer their patients for advice. Although there is no cure, there is help to manage this life-long condition.

Early diagnosis and treatment are vital to control lymphedema

Lymphedema Management

The goal of lymphedema treatment is to help reduce and control swelling, prevent it from getting worse and decrease the chance of complications. Ongoing self-care is crucial. The standard treatment is called Complete Decongestive Therapy (CDT). The individual elements, used in combination, are:

Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD)—a specialized massage to redirect lymph fluid

Compression therapy—elastic bandaging, compression sleeves, gauntlets or tights

Exercise—to promote lymphatic flow by activating muscle and joint pumps

Excellent skin care—the use of antibacterial cleansers and pH neutral lotions

The treatments must be performed by an experienced and certified therapist who has completed at least 135 hours of post graduate training specific to lymphedema. We can help you find a certified therapist near you.

Precautions & Recommendations

Infections

With damaged or blocked lymph drainage, you are at risk of infection (particularly cellulitis) in the affected area. Good skin care reduces the risk of infection.

AVOID

- cuts
- scratches
- burns
- razors
- insect bites
- fungal infection
- sunburn

USE

- rubber gloves
- gardening gloves
- oven gloves
- electric shaver
- insect repellents
- hygiene/skin care
- strong sunscreen

If you feel generally unwell or have any sign of infection (fever, nausea, vomiting or a hot, red, tender, swollen limb) do not delay in seeking medical attention immediately. In most circumstance you will require antibiotics.

Trauma

Any trauma or injury to the affected limb will increase your risk of infection and further swelling. AVOID whenever possible: injections, acupuncture, blood sampling and blood pressure readings from the affected limb AND tight or constricting clothing or jewelry PLUS extremes of heat or cold.

General Recommendations

- It is important to keep your weight within normal limits as much as possible.
- Try to use the swollen limb normally, as muscular activity encourages lymph drainage, but avoid sudden over-exertion, as that may increase swelling.
- If your arm is swollen, avoid lifting or carrying heavy objects. If your leg is swollen, avoid standing or sitting with your legs down for long periods.
- Wear a compression garment when flying to help reduce any increase in swelling.

We Can Help

The Lymphedema Association of Ontario (LAO) offers:

Support by offering information on lymphedema treatment, products, resources, CDT certified therapists, registrants of the Assistive Device Program (ADP) and support groups in Ontario through our toll free information line, email, newsletters and website*



Outreach through our website, newsletter, educational events geared to patients, those at risk and health care professionals

Advocacy for improved access to treatment and increased health care and insurance coverage

Collaboration by strengthening partnerships with all stakeholders, promoting research and contributing to a stronger lymphedema community

*We do not provide medical advice or treatment

 **Lymphedema**
Association of Ontario

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All revenues that support the LAO come from any proceeds made from membership fees, donations, an annual charity walk fundraiser, advertising in our newsletter and LAO events.