Care of Your Arm After Lymph Node Removal (Female)

The lymph system helps to get rid of waste products from your cells and helps your body fight infection. Some lymph nodes, a part of the lymph system, were removed during your surgery. Now you will need to take special care of your arm to help reduce the risk of swelling. Swelling, called lymphedema, (pronounced lim-fe-dee'-ma) can occur after surgery and can increase your chance of infection. Early signs of lymphedema include a feeling of heaviness in the limb, clothes that fit tighter on one side or jewelry feeling too tight.

Skin and Arm Care

- Keep your arm clean and dry. Use a low pH (between 4 to 6) lotion every day to prevent dryness. Below is a list of lotions with their PH Level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>PH Level</th>
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<th>PH Level</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cerave Lotion</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>Eucerin Original Dry Skin Therapy Lotion</td>
<td>5.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aveeno Daily Moisturizing Lotion</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>Cetaphil Daily Advance Ultra Hydrating Lotion</td>
<td>5.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaseline Intensive Rescue Skin Protectant Body Lotion</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>Aquanil Lotion</td>
<td>5.19</td>
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This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

• Compression garments, such as a sleeve, should fit correctly.
• Avoid cutting cuticles when clipping your nails.
• Use sunscreen and insect repellent to protect your arm from sunburn and insects bites.
• Be careful when you use a razor to avoid nicks and skin irritation. You may want to use an electric razor for shaving.
• Wear gloves while doing activities that may cause skin injury like gardening, working with tools or using chemicals such as detergents.
• Do not wear tight jewelry (bracelets and rings), tight clothing or elastic bands on the arm that had the lymph nodes removed. They can squeeze the arm and increase swelling.
• If you get a scratch, bite, burn or break in your skin, wash the area at once with soap and water. Cover the area with a bandage to keep it clean and to protect it from infection. Check at least once a day to make sure it is healing well.
• Avoid exposure to extreme cold and heat, such as hot tubs and saunas. Do not put your arm in water that is above a temperature of 120° degrees Fahrenheit.

Lifestyle and Activity

• Wear your compression garment (sleeve) during strenuous activity, such as exercising.
• Wear your garment during air travel.
• Do not carry heavy shoulder bags or luggage with over-the-shoulder straps.
• When raising your activity level or starting an exercise program, slowly increase the amount of time and energy you spend doing the activity or exercise.
• Take frequent breaks during an activity to allow your arm to rest.
• Be careful when lifting objects greater than 15 pounds. Do not lift things repeatedly. **Always follow the lifting precautions given to you by your doctor.**
• Check your arm for any changes in size, shape, tissue texture, soreness, heaviness or firmness.
• If an activity causes your arm to swell, then it may not be an activity you should do right now. A physical therapist can help you find the best exercises and activities to keep your arm strong and healthy.

• Swimming, walking, bike riding, certain yoga and ballet movements may be good for your arm.

• Try to keep an ideal body weight by eating a balanced, low fat, low sodium (salt) diet.

Call your doctor if you:

• Seriously injure your arm

• See signs of infection which may include:
  ▶ Pain
  ▶ Arm is warm to the touch
  ▶ Redness
  ▶ Swelling
  ▶ Drainage that smells bad

It is important to check your arm each day for any of these problems. If you have 2 or more of these problems, call your doctor right away.

Other Ways to Protect Yourself

Having procedures done to your arm cannot always be prevented, but it is helpful to reduce this risk when you can. Often people buy medical “alert” bracelets or necklaces to let health care workers know special precautions are needed for their arm, when doing procedures such as blood draws, IV’s or blood pressure.

Lymphedema Clinic

A special clinic to help with lymphedema is located in The Stefanie Spielman Comprehensive Breast Center, 1145 Olentangy River Road, Columbus, OH 43212. Physical Therapy is covered by most insurance plans. You will need a doctor’s order for this service. You may make an appointment at the Lymphedema Clinic by calling (614) 293-0043, or stop by after your doctor visit.
The Lymphedema Clinic offers the following treatments:

- Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD massage)
- Skin care
- Specialized compression bandaging
- Measurement/fitting of compression garments
- Patient specific exercises