Care of Your Leg After Lymph Node Removal

The lymphatic system helps get rid of waste products from your cells and helps your body fight infection. Some lymph nodes, a part of your lymphatic system, were removed during surgery. It is important to take special care of your leg to help reduce the risk of a problem called lymphedema, (pronounced lim-fe-dee-ma). Early signs of lymphedema may include a feeling of heaviness, tightness, aching or fatigue in your leg. Swelling may or may not be present.

Reduce the Risk of Swelling

- Physical activity and stretching can help to increase the circulation in your lymph system:
  - **Check with your doctor before you start an exercise program.** Ask if there are any special precautions you should follow.
  - Do not stand or sit in one place for a long time. Do not cross your legs when you sit.
  - Choose activities that help improve circulation, such as walking, biking, swimming or dancing.
  - Exercise 20 minutes each day, 4 times each week. If told to do so, wear your compression garment when you exercise.
• Start slowly and increase your activity over a period of time.
• Heat and humidity may increase your swelling. It is better to exercise when it is cooler.
• If an activity causes swelling in your leg, then it may not be an activity you should do right now. A physical therapist or certified lymphedema therapist can help you find the best exercises and activities to keep your leg strong and healthy.

• Obesity can increase the chance of swelling.
  • Eat a diet high in fiber and low in fat.
  • To prevent a buildup of fluid in your body, stay away from foods high in salt.
  • Drink 8 to 10 cups of non-caffeinated fluid each day to stay hydrated.

To Reduce the Risk of Infection and Protect Your Skin
• Do not do anything that may cause swelling or infection in your leg or foot:
  • Keep your leg clean and dry. Use a low pH (between 4 to 6) lotion each day that is free of perfumes and dyes to prevent dryness. Below is a list of lotions with their pH Level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<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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• To protect your leg from the sun, use sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher) and cover your leg when outside.
• Use insect repellent.
• Wear shoes when outdoors.
• Do not wear tight stockings, shoes or elastic bands around your affected leg.
When possible, do not have your blood pressure taken in your affected leg.

When possible, do not have injections, blood draws or an intravenous line (IV) placed in your affected leg.

If you get a cut, scratch, bite, burn or any break in your skin, wash the area at once with soap and water. Cover the area with a bandage to keep it clean and protect it from infection. Check at least one time each day to make sure it is healing well.

Call your doctor if you:

- Seriously injure your leg
- See signs of infection which may include:
  - Chills or fever of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius) or higher
  - Pain
  - Leg is warm to the touch
  - Redness or change in color
  - Rash
  - Swelling
  - Drainage that smells bad

It is important to check your leg each day and call your doctor right away if you have any of these problems.

Other Ways to Protect Yourself

You may be unable to prevent having procedures done to your affected leg, but it is helpful to reduce the risk of injury to your leg when you can. Wear a medical “alert” bracelet or necklace to let health care workers know special precautions are needed to care for your leg. For more information about medical jewelry, you may find it helpful to call one of the following:

- National Lymphedema Network (www.lymphnet.org) at 1-800-541-3259 or 510-809-1660
- Medic Alert (www.medicalert.org) at 1-800-432-5378
When you are at The James, you will be asked to wear a pink band on your affected leg. This pink band reminds your health care team members that your leg needs to be protected.

For more information on lymphedema, ask for the patient education handout, Lymphedema and Treatment Options.

**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.

**The Lymphedema Clinic offers the following treatments:**

- Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD) massage
- Skin care
- Specialized compression bandaging
- Lymph drainage exercises
- Measurement and fitting of compression garments
- Physical therapy