

## Treating Infections

See your doctor straight away if your limb:

- swells quickly or
- becomes red and warm.

You may have a skin infection called cellulitis and need antibiotics.



## Practical tips for managing your lymphoedema

### Skin care

- use moisturising cream regularly (e.g. sorbolene) so that your skin doesn't dry out
- protect your skin by wearing gloves for yard work, washing dishes or handling pets
- treat scratches, skin sores or cuts immediately
- use an electric razor for shaving to avoid cuts
- avoid tattoos and body piercing



### Foot care

- wear shoes when outdoors
- dry between your toes
- avoid ingrown toenails by cutting them carefully
- treat tinea, cuts or sores immediately

### Exercise

- keep active and try to keep to a healthy weight. This will help the circulation of lymph fluid. If your limb swells during exercise, speak to your doctor.

## Questions to ask your doctor, Indigenous health worker or nurse

You may like to talk to someone about lymphoedema. This can include your doctor, local Indigenous health worker or nurse. Some questions you may ask are:

- Should I be referred to a lymphoedema practitioner and how much will it cost?
- Do I need to wear a compression garment and how much will it cost?
- What can I do at home to help my lymphoedema?
- What type of exercises should I do?
- Who should I contact if I have an infection?
- Will lymphoedema affect my work?
- How might my family and community life be affected?
- If I change doctors should I tell them about my cancer?

## Useful contacts and websites

Health workers in your local community can help you find out more about lymphoedema and how to locate a lymphoedema practitioner or clinic.

You can also contact the National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre for more information on 1800 624973 or go to [www.nbocc.org.au](http://www.nbocc.org.au)



# LYMPHOEDEMA

## What is lymphoedema?

Lymphoedema is a chronic swelling of part of the body that can occur after treatment for cancer.

There are lymph nodes all around the body including the armpit, groin, abdomen, chest and neck.

Lymphatic vessels carry the lymph fluid to lymph nodes where harmful bacteria are filtered out and destroyed. This helps to protect the body from infection.

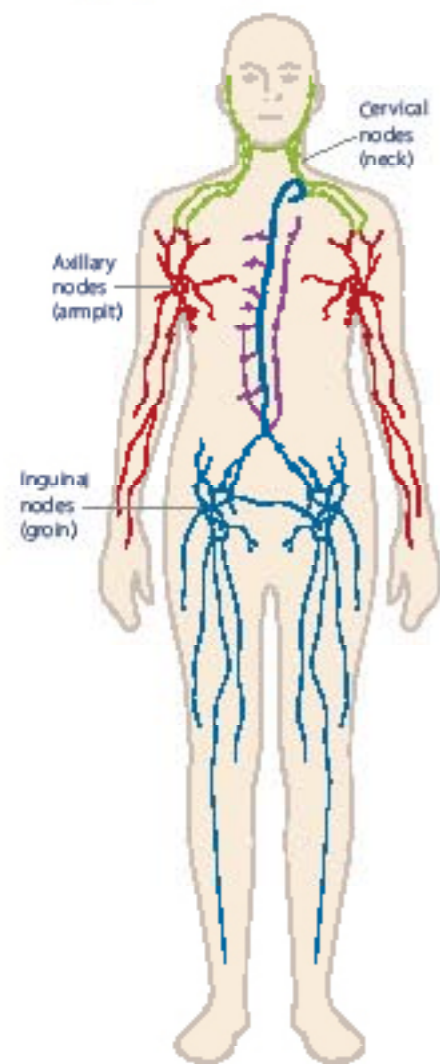
Surgery or radiotherapy can damage the lymph nodes and this can stop the lymph fluid from flowing through the body. This causes the swelling that is lymphoedema.

Lymphoedema usually develops slowly and can appear months or years after treatment for cancer.

Lymphoedema is not the same as the swelling and pain that follows immediately after surgery or radiotherapy.



## The lymphatic system



Lymphoedema may affect the arm after treatment for breast cancer.



If nodes in the groin are removed, the leg may swell.



Swelling in the head and neck can also occur after treatment for cancer in these areas of the body.

## What are the early signs of lymphoedema?

- Your limb may feel heavy.
- Your clothing or jewellery may feel tight because of swelling in your limbs.
- Your limb may ache or feel painful.

Some of these early signs may come and go. Eventually your limbs may look different. One may be bigger than the other.

## How is lymphoedema managed?

While there is no cure for the condition and it will require life-long management, with proper daily care:

- swelling can be reduced
- movement can be improved
- infections can be prevented.

If left untreated, lymphoedema can affect your mobility and may impact on your family and community life.

## Treatment

- Keep your skin healthy.
- Prevent infection.
- Do specific exercises.
- Raise the limb to reduce swelling during rest periods.

In some cases, a compression bandage or garment may be fitted by a lymphoedema practitioner who may also perform special massage techniques.

