

Coping With Lymphedema

People with cancer who have undergone lymph node removal and/or radiation as part of their treatment are at risk for developing lymphedema. Lymphedema is a painful swelling that happens when your body's lymphatic fluid is unable to circulate properly and builds up in your soft tissues instead. It usually occurs in an arm or leg.

Lymphedema is most often associated with breast cancer but can result from treatment of other cancers, such as melanoma, prostate cancer, advanced gynecological cancers, and cancers that have spread to the lower abdominal area. It can affect both women and men and can occur at any time after treatment, even years later.

Here are some points to consider when discussing lymphedema with your health care team, as well as some steps you can take to manage your symptoms.

- ☞ **Get the facts.** Having complete, accurate information about lymphedema from your doctor or nurse can help you feel prepared to manage this condition.
- ☞ **Get help for your symptoms as soon as possible.** In addition to swelling of the affected limb, the most common problems are pain, hardening of the skin, and loss of mobility. Lymphedema must be addressed. If left untreated, it can get worse and may cause permanent damage.
- ☞ **Consider having an “MLD” massage.** The most common method of treatment is a special massage called manual lymph drainage, or MLD. This type of massage helps move the fluid out from where it is settled. Afterwards, the affected limb is wrapped in low-stretch bandages that are padded with foam or gauze.
- ☞ **Learn exercises that can help prevent swelling.** Your health care team can refer you to a program of special exercises that are taught and monitored by a trained physical therapist.
- ☞ **Wear a compression sleeve.** This can help drain the lymph fluid. It's important to wear a compression garment when flying, even on short flights.
- ☞ **Wear gloves.** Always wear gloves when gardening or removing items from the oven or stove.



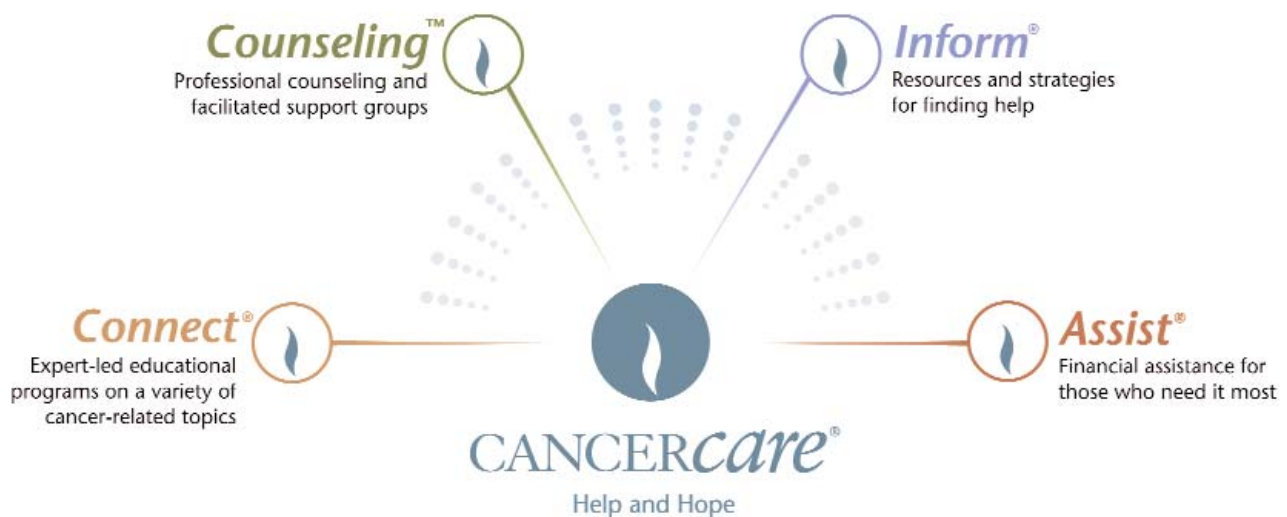
- ☞ **Always treat scratches, cuts, and insect bites by cleaning the area and applying an antibiotic ointment.** If you notice swelling or redness, please contact your doctor immediately. Bring your own nail care supplies when you have a manicure, and ask them not to cut your cuticles.
- ☞ **Be kind to your body.** Carrying heavy packages, luggage, or shoulder bags puts stress on your affected limb and could cause additional swelling and pain.

Lymphedema can be managed successfully. This involves making some lifestyle changes, protecting your affected limb from injury, and knowing what you can do to help control your lymphedema.

CANCERCARE CAN HELP

CancerCare's staff of professional oncology social workers can help you cope with lymphedema. Our social workers offer people with cancer and their loved ones individual counseling and support groups by telephone, online, or in person. CancerCare also offers education, practical help and referrals to other resources that can help you manage concerns related to cancer.

The CANCERCare® Constellation of Services



CancerCare's services are provided free of charge to anyone affected by cancer

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