

What is Lymphedema?

Lymph is a thin, watery fluid containing protein, water, blood and fat. Originating in the organs and tissues of the body, lymph circulates through the lymphatic vessels and is filtered by lymph nodes. Lymphedema is an abnormal accumulation of lymph fluid between the skin and muscles of the body after the lymphatic system has been damaged. The accumulation of lymph fluid in the affected area causes swelling.

What Causes Lymphedema?

Causes of lymphedema include injury, scarring, radiation or excision of lymph nodes, repeated infections or paralysis with dependent limb position.

Symptoms of Lymphedema

Lymphedema causes swelling with a feeling of heaviness and tightness, usually in an arm or leg. In most cases, only one arm or leg is affected. Swelling in the leg usually begins in the foot and then moves up to the ankle and knee.

You are a candidate for treatment if you have any of the following indications:

- A dull ache in the affected limb.
- A feeling of tightness in the skin of the affected limb.
- Difficulty moving a limb or bending at the joint because of swelling and tightness.
- Pitting – small indentation left on the skin after pressure is applied to affected area.
- Shoes, rings or watches suddenly fit too tightly.
- Surgery or cancer treatment including lymph node removal and/or radiation.

Lymphedema can make it easier to develop skin infections. Signs include fever, pain, heat and redness. If lymphedema becomes chronic (long lasting), the skin in the affected area often becomes thickened and fibrotic/firm.

Stages of Lymphedema

Latency Stage– No swelling, reduced transport capacity, “Normal consistency”.

Stage I (Reversible)– Edema is soft (pitting), no secondary tissue changes, elevation reduces swelling.

Stage II (Spontaneously Irreversible)– Fibrosclerotic changes, hardening of the tissue.

Stage III (Lymphostatic elephantiasis)– Extreme increase in volume and texture with typical skin changes (deep skin folds).

Our Staff

Kitty DeGree Breast Health Center
currently has one

Certified Lymphedema Therapist and Program Coordinator:



Sharlane Adams
LOTR, MLD/CDP



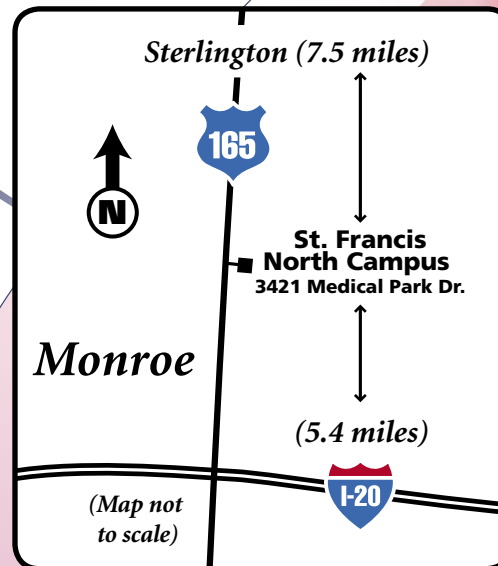
Shari Buffington
Program Coordinator

Our therapist has successfully completed 135 hours of certification offered by the Academy of Lymphatic Studies. She is certified in the Vodder Technique of Manual Lymph Drainage. The Vodder Technique is a highly advanced technique based on solid scientific research and includes all components of MLD/CDT.

The Kitty DeGree Breast Health Center is located at St. Francis North Campus

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Therapy Services: (318) 966-8644
Breast Health Center: (318) 812-7465
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Lymphedema Treatment Services



ST. FRANCIS MEDICAL CENTER
Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Health System
Kitty DeGree Breast Health Center

Diagnosis of Lymphedema

Diagnosis of lymphedema is made by a physician based on both a physical examination of the patient and questions about medical and family history. This may indicate an inherited disorder. Usually, no specific testing is necessary. However, the following tests may be ordered if there is no obvious cause of the condition:

- Blood count – a high level of white cells could indicate an infection.
- Ultrasound – used to look for blood clots which may be the cause of swelling.
- CT scan – used to look for a mass or tumor which may be blocking lymph vessels in the swollen arm or leg.

Treatment of Lymphedema

Basic treatment for lymphedema includes:

- Elevating the affected limb.
- Exercises to reduce swelling.
- Keeping the affected limb clean and dry, periodically applying lubricating lotions.

Manual Lymph Drainage and Complete Decongestive Therapy (MLD/CDT) are the treatments of choice for the condition known as lymphedema. Chronic lymphedema on the upper extremities responds well to this specialized treatment. Left untreated, lymphedema can lead to serious consequences.

Manual Lymph Drainage

Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD) is a gentle manual treatment which improves the activity and function of the lymph vessels. In the case of lymphedema, MLD helps re-route the lymph flow around the blocked areas into more centrally-located lymph vessels that drain into the venous system.

Compression Therapy

Compression Therapy increases the tissue pressure and is applied between treatments to prevent the re-accumulation of evacuated lymph fluid. In the decongestive phase (first phase)

of treatment, multi-layered short stretch bandages are applied to the affected area. In phase two (improvement phase), compression garments are used.



Exercise

Decongestive exercises performed by the patient while wearing compression bandages or garments aid the lymph kinetic effects of the joint and muscle pumps. This will lead to further reduction of the swollen extremity. Abdominal breathing also serves the return of lymph fluid to the venous systems.



Skin Care



Infections, such as cellulitis or fungal infections, can be a serious complication in lymphedema. Meticulous skin care while recovering from lymphedema is an essential part of the treatment program.

Expected Duration

How long lymphedema lasts depends on its cause. If lymphedema develops immediately after surgery, it can clear up within one week as the swelling subsides and the arm or leg is elevated to allow better drainage. If surgery or radiation therapy produced long-term damage to the lymphatic system, lymphedema can become a long-term or recurring problem.

Goals of Lymphedema Treatment

- Utilize remaining lymph vessels and other lymphatic pathways to decongest swollen body parts arm and ipsilateral (same side) trunk quadrant.
- Eliminate fibrotic (scar) tissue.
- Avoid the reaccumulation lymph fluid.
- Prevent/eliminate infections.
- Maintain normal near normal size of limb.



Prevention

After breast cancer, your doctor or occupational therapist may advise that you do specific exercises once you have fully recovered from the surgery. Using your muscles can encourage the flow of lymph fluid through small channels. After breast surgery, you are less likely to develop lymphedema if you....

- Avoid temperature extremes – i.e., hot baths, hot tubs, hot showers, saunas, Turkish baths.
- Protect skin – wear sunscreen and insect repellent to avoid burns and insect bites.
- Avoid injections, blood draws, and acupuncture in affected extremity.
- Avoid repetitive motions against resistance – i.e., scrubbing, pushing, pulling and lifting greater than 10 pounds.
- Avoid manicures – do not cut cuticles. Treat infections promptly and vigorously.
- Maintain nutrition – eat a low-salt, low fat diet and maintain ideal weight.
- Wear compression garments/bandages while flying.
- Avoid use of diuretics if at all possible.

Insurance Coverage

According to the Women's Health and Cancer Rights Act of 1998, insurance companies do reimburse for treatments of complications resulting from breast cancer surgery.

How to get help?

Contact the Kitty Degree Breast Health Center at (318) 812-PINK or St. Francis Therapy Services at (318) 966-8644 for information, assistance or scheduling an appointment. This therapy is a medical procedure, and a physician referral is required to initiate treatment. You may obtain this referral through your family physician, surgeon or oncologist. Our staff can assist you in this process.

First
in Lymphedema Treatment.
Foremost
in Caring for Women.