

Who is affected by lymphedema

Lymphedema affects at least 3 million Americans. The onset of primary lymphedema may occur at birth (congenital); at puberty (precoxal); or later in life (tardal); with no known cause. The more common type of lymphedema is the secondary type, which usually occurs after surgery or radiation therapy, for various cancers. A common example is post-breast surgery where lymph nodes have been removed.



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**Ascension Saint Agnes Hospital is
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Lymphedema management



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Lymphedema management

Treatment to help remove excess fluid in tissue spaces

Signs and symptoms

Although symptoms may vary slightly in different people, any of the following may occur:

- Onset may be gradual or sudden.
- Swelling is common in the hands or feet, and may be detected if jewelry or footwear is too tight.
- Swelling may also occur in the trunk region due to surgical scars or lymph node removal that may disrupt lymph flow.
- Initially, the swelling is soft and spongy and if not treated adequately, progresses to hard and dense.
- Cosmetic appearance may change (i.e. color variations, dry or flaky skin, loss of hair).
- Sensory changes or tingling may also occur.

What is lymphedema?

If you have a swollen body part, such as an arm or leg, you could have lymphedema. This condition is an abnormal accumulation of protein-rich fluid in the tissue spaces, caused by a malfunction of the lymphatic system. Lymphedema is incurable, but controllable with diligent care.

Services available

Our physical and occupational therapists have specialized training in lymphedema management. Treatment may include one or more of the following:

- Manual lymphedema drainage massage
- Compression bandaging
- Vasopneumatic compression pumping
- Compression garments
- Home exercise programs
- Patient and family education
- Skin care treatment
- Nutritional guidance

Precautions

Those suffering from lymphedema can help themselves in the management of this condition by observing the following precautions:

- Avoid blood pressure or needle sticks in the affected limb.
- Avoid insect bites to the limb.
- Avoid wearing constrictive clothing or jewelry on the affected limb.
- Avoid sunburns, oven burns, cuts and abrasions.
- Avoid vigorous exercise or heavy lifting.
- Reduce salt and fat intake in your diet.

