

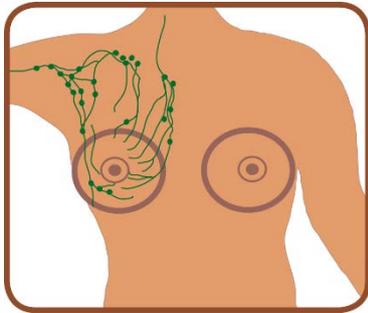
Lymphoedema



Produced by Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA)

Based on BCNA's *Lymphoedema* fact sheet

What is lymphoedema?

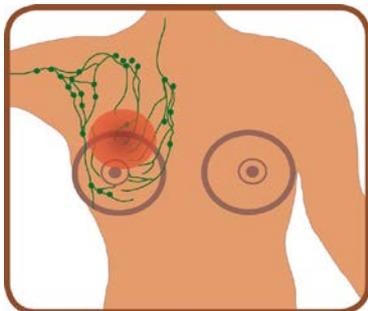


Lymph is a fluid that goes around the body and removes particles that may cause damage.

The lymph then goes through lymph nodes that remove the particles safely.

If the lymph nodes are damaged or removed, lymph fluid can build up in the tissues. This causes a swelling known as 'lymphoedema'.

Women with breast cancer might have lymphoedema



If cancer cells spread beyond your breast they often spread to the lymph nodes in the armpits.

If cancer cells spread to these lymph nodes they must be removed.

Not everyone gets lymphoedema. You might get lymphoedema if

- you have had lymph nodes removed
- you have had radiotherapy to the armpit.





How do you know if you have lymphoedema?

Lymphoedema can happen after surgery, even many years later.

Be aware of feelings in your arms, breast area, shoulders, chest or hands. You may feel



- swollen or tight (you may notice that your rings, sleeves or wristbands feel tight)



- aches or pain.



If you feel any of these see your doctor as soon as possible.



There are things you can do to reduce your risk of lymphoedema



If you might get bitten by insects, use an insect repellent. If you are bitten, use a product so that your skin does not itch.



Take good care of your skin.

Try to

- protect it from the sun
- protect it from cuts and scratches
- take care of injuries straight away
- use sorbolene.



If you shave your armpit use an electric razor.



Use gloves when you wash the dishes or work in the garden.



Keep active to increase lymph flow.



If a cut or scratch becomes red or warm see your doctor as soon as possible.



There are things that can increase your risk of lymphoedema

X



Try not to

- overuse the arm that had surgery
- let your arm get too hot
- go to spa baths or have a hot bath.

X



Try not to wear

- tight clothes and bra straps
- tight watches and bracelets.



Take care when you travel

When you travel by plane, bus, car or train, parts of your body may become swollen. When you travel, try not to



- rush around



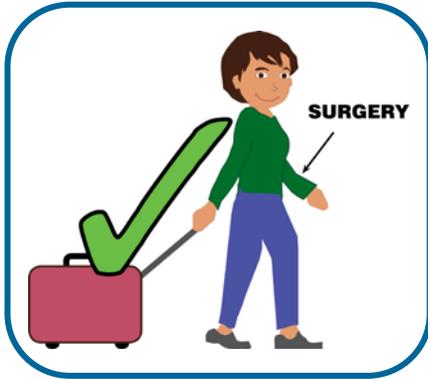
- sit still for a long time



- carry heavy bags.

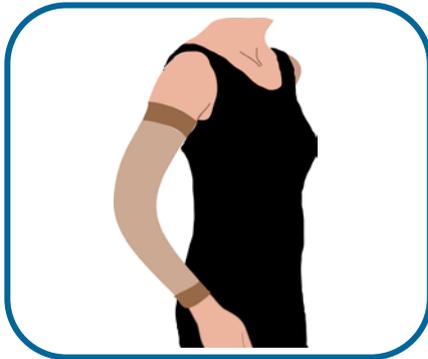


Tips when you travel



Carry your bags on the side you have not had surgery. Use bags with wheels.

Exercise your arm. Go for a walk every 2 hours.



Wear a compression sleeve.

How you can manage lymphoedema

There is no cure for lymphoedema. To make it better, you can try

- good skin care
- massage
- gentle exercise
- compression sleeves.



Compression sleeves need to be fitted well. Your doctor will tell you where to get one.



Where to find more information



Breast Cancer Network Australia

For breast cancer information and support, call 1800 500 258 or visit bcna.org.au



Talk to your doctor



Australasian Lymphology Association

For lymphoedema help, support and information in your area call (03) 9586 6030 or visit lymphoedema.org.au



Australian Government
Cancer Australia

Cancer Australia

For booklets on lymphoedema call 1800 624 973 or visit canceraustralia.gov.au