

Lymphedema

FACTS:

- Lymphedema is a condition where excess fluid becomes trapped in tissue and causes swelling.
- The problem may be caused by too few lymph nodes in a limb or a blockage of the lymphatic vessels. These vessels are small channels like blood vessels that contain a clear fluid called lymph.
- This problem usually affects the legs but can also affect the arms. It may only affect one limb or several.
- A significant increase in swelling may occur over time, resulting in limbs that are clearly enlarged.
- Infection is the most common complication.
- Some children might have difficulty in wearing shoes or pants or in using an affected limb in daily activities.



Swelling in an arm or leg may be an indication of lymphedema.



It is important to keep skin moisturized and free of infection.



Lymphedema

TREATMENT:

- Usually swelling becomes less pronounced with age. The majority of children only need supportive treatment, but approximately one-third of patients will need surgical intervention.
- Elevating a limb to help drain fluid is often helpful.
- Look for looser clothing for a child and shoes that allow the swollen foot to be comfortable.
- Excellent foot care is essential. Make sure there are no ingrown toenails, that toe nails are cut straight across and the skin between the toes is kept dry and very clean to prevent fungus from developing.
- Exercise and activity help lymph fluid decrease. Swimming is excellent, as is riding a bike, using a trampoline or walking up steps.
- Supportive stockings and elastic garments worn throughout the day over the affected limb, may decrease swelling.
- If available, overnight use of an intermittent pneumatic compression pump (a device that moves fluid from the end of a limb upwards toward the heart) can be very effective.



Children should be encouraged to be active.



Lymphedema does not have to stop a child from having a happy life.

- Skin care is extremely important. Infection should be promptly treated with antibiotics and bed rest.
- Consult with a doctor if fever, redness and tenderness are present in the affected limb.
- When supportive measures fail and a limb becomes too heavy to maneuver during daily activities, or when normal clothing or shoes cannot be worn, surgical options may be considered.
- Patients with recurrent infections may also benefit from surgery.