



Top 5 Myths about Lymphedema!

Myth #1 - "I can never lift anything over 5 lbs again."

This is just false. The original thinking was lifting something heavy (think piano vs. gallon of milk) could strain your muscles, increase inflammation, and trigger lymphedema. Thus far the research hasn't supported this claim. What it has supported, however is the IMPORTANCE of strength training for improved body image, decreased weight, and overall health and even to improve the function of the lymphatic system.

*Note: if you haven't lifted anything in a long while, 5lbs can be heavy! Always important to start slowly, lift a weight that you assume is going to be easy for you, and if it is, just do more reps. *If you already have* a history of lymphedema, wear your sleeve when you exercise. And if you've recently had surgery, check with your doctor first!

Myth #2 - "I MUST wear my sleeve on a plane, or I'll get LYMPHEDEMA!!"

Controversy alert! For years, the recommendation was "If you had even ONE lymph node removed, you MUST wear a compression sleeve on an airplane." Many research papers later, the new consensus is, "um, maybe?"

This is what we know for sure: If you've had lymphedema in the past, then yes wear your sleeve. However, if you are at risk for lymphedema but haven't actually experienced it, then it's about making a decision you feel comfortable with. Is there a downside to wearing one? Probably not (unless you keep your arms folded the entire time in which case you might impair your own circulation, but no one knows for sure). The current recommendation is: "Discuss with your Certified Lymphedema Therapist."

Myth #3 - "Lymphedema is painful and once you get it, it won't ever go away."

Lymphedema is typically not associated with pain, ie, if you have a new pain in your arm, but do not see any swelling, it's probably not lymphedema. The biggest sign of lymphedema is change in size as compared to the other side.

Regarding "it won't ever go away," lymphedema is more like back pain versus a tattoo. When someone has back pain, it's possible it's a one-time flair up. It's also possible they are at risk for throwing their back out again in the future, making it a good idea to make some changes in their life (such as daily stretching, maybe weight loss, etc). For some, it does become a debilitating condition that puts them out of work. The point is, back pain has a

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wide variety of outcomes, and the same is true with lymphedema. It may be a one-time occurrence, or it may be something you have to actively manage the rest of your life.

To be fair, just like with back pain, it's worthwhile to learn ways to reduce your risk before developing it.

Myth #4 - "One day I might wake up with a GIGANTIC ARM!!!"

Oh, google. You just love to show us the worst case and scariest scenarios, don't you. Ok, so those giant elephantiasis arms you've seen pictures of? That in no way happened over night. That was like someone's arm started to swell, and for whatever reason months and months went by (maybe even years) without anyone addressing it. Since you are reading this, you are obviously a conscientious person who would notice any small changes in your arm size (here's a [video](#) to help you learn to self-monitor). If you notice changes, make an appointment with your friendly local Certified Lymphedema Therapist to address it.

Myth #5 - "My doctor told me otherwise, and she's a doctor so she must be an expert."

In Western Medicine, physicians often specialize in one field, and are THE EXPERTS in these fields- oncology is a perfect example. Your surgeon is different from your plastic surgeon, your oncologist from your radiation oncologist, etc. And that's great! You want the person administering chemotherapy to be an expert in chemotherapy. Unfortunately, lymphedema is just one field most MDs cannot plow. The reason? According to a 2011 study by D. Vuong, M. Nguyen and N. Piller, North American medical schools spend less than 30 MINUTES on lymphatic function and dysfunction. Contrast that to the 135 hours required to become a Certified Lymphedema Specialist. Big difference!

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