

Lymphedema Care

Your lymphatic system plays an important role in immune function (your body's ability to fight infections) and circulation. Lymph vessels collect lymph, a colorless watery fluid from body tissues that contains waste. The vessels carry lymph to lymph nodes where it is filtered and then returned back into the bloodstream. Lymph nodes are in your neck, armpits and groin, making up the lymphatic system.

If you have any questions, please talk with your physician.

Lymphedema

Lymphedema is swelling in a part of your body when fluid builds up in the tissues. This can happen when the lymphatic system is not working as it should. The following conditions are the most common causes of lymphedema.

- › Infections
- › Trauma or injury
- › Cancer
- › Surgery from cancer
- › Radiation
- › Lymph node removal
- › Obesity
- › Hereditary factors

Symptoms

Lymphedema may cause the following symptoms:

- › Swelling
- › Limited motion in the affected area
- › Heaviness, tightness or aching sensations in the affected area
- › Constant skin infections
- › Skin that becomes hard and thick
- › Scarring in the affected tissues
- › Increased warmth in the affected area

What to do if you have lymphedema

Follow these instructions to ease symptoms and prevent lymphedema from getting worse.

- › Wear loose clothing and jewelry.
- › Avoid trauma or injury to the affected area, including blood pressure checks and skin punctures.
- › Avoid extreme heat or cold on the affected area.
- › Avoid repetitive movements in the affected area.
- › Avoid too much salt in your diet.
- › Raise the affected area when possible.
- › Keep your skin clean and moisturized.

When to call your physician

Contact your primary care physician if you have any of these signs.

- › Signs of infection such as redness, swelling and increased skin temperature
- › Body temperature more than 100.4 degrees F or as directed by your physician
- › Skin changes such as a rash or blisters
- › Pain in the affected area

If you are having a medical emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.

Outpatient treatment options

Outpatient physical therapy and occupational therapy for lymphedema may:

- › Reduce swelling to a normal or near-normal size
- › Help wounds heal and lower the risk of skin infections
- › Soften skin and improve skin health
- › Improve functioning of the affected body part
- › Improve your quality of life
- › Help you regain independence for everyday tasks

Talk with your physician about the right treatment for you.

Complete decongestive therapy

Complete decongestive therapy (CDT) is a safe and non-invasive therapy for lymphedema. You work with a certified lymphedema therapist.

Therapy will include, but is not limited to:

- › Compression garments and wrapping
- › Exercises
- › Skin care
- › Manual lymphatic drainage

Northwestern Medicine's treatment approach also includes:

- › Pre- and post-operative assessment and education
- › Compression garment fitting and training
- › Kinesio taping
- › Personalized exercise plans
- › Skin care education
- › Self-care education
- › Lymphedema resources
- › Support group opportunities


To seek outpatient treatment

Talk with your physician about whether lymphedema therapy with an outpatient Certified Lymphedema Therapist (CLT) is an option for you.

1. Your primary care physician can place a referral for a CLT.
2. Find a CLT near you.
3. Contact that office to schedule an evaluation and initial appointment.

Chicago area locations

- › Northwestern Medicine Outpatient Rehabilitation Oak Brook
1001 Commerce Drive, Suite 600
Oak Brook, Illinois
630.933.1500
- › Northwestern Medicine Outpatient Rehabilitation Orland Park
15430 West Avenue
Orland Park, Illinois
708.923.5050
- › Northwestern Medicine Outpatient Rehabilitation Warrenville
4525 Weaver Parkway, Suite 100A
Warrenville, Illinois
630.933.1500
- › Northwestern Medicine Outpatient Rehabilitation Geneva
296 South Randall Road
Geneva, Illinois
630.933.1500
- › Northwestern Medicine Outpatient Rehabilitation Cary
2615 Three Oaks Road
Cary, Illinois
630.933.1500
- › Northwestern Medicine Outpatient Rehabilitation McHenry
4305 Medical Center Drive, Suite 3
McHenry, Illinois
630.933.1500
- › Northwestern Medicine Outpatient Rehabilitation Woodstock
3703 Doty Road
Woodstock, Illinois
630.933.1500

- 
- › Northwestern Medicine Outpatient Rehabilitation Sycamore
2111 Midlands Court
Sycamore, Illinois
630.933.1500
 - › Northwestern Medicine Outpatient Rehabilitation Lake Forest
1200 North Westmoreland Road, Suites 100 and 200
Lake Forest, Illinois
630.933.1500
 - › Shirley Ryan Ability Lab
355 East Erie Street
Chicago, Illinois
312.238.1000

TTY for all locations: 711

Your inpatient occupational therapist can help you find more resources.
If you have any questions, talk with your physician.

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our
website at [nm.org](https://www.nm.org).