

HEAD AND NECK CANCER & LYMPHEDEMA

www.headandneck.org

WHAT IS LYMPHEDEMA?

The body's lymphatic system is made up of lymph fluid, vessels, and nodes that work together to fight infection. When the system is damaged by radiation or surgery, lymph fluid cannot flow through the system the way that it should. It collects under the skin, causing swelling.

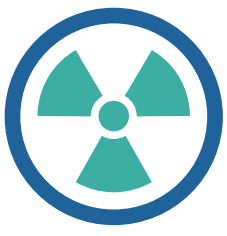
LYMPHEDEMA FACTS

>75%

of HNC patients will experience lymphedema during or after treatment for their cancer.

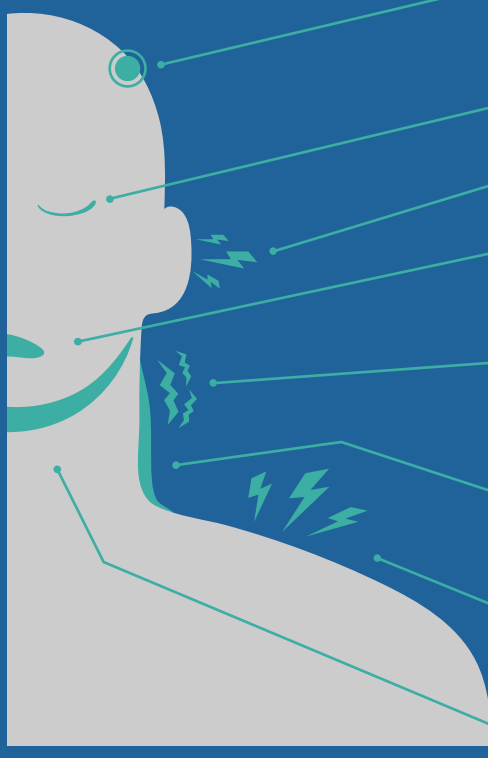
>30%

of the body's lymph nodes are located in the head and neck.



Lymphedema in HNC can be caused by radiation or surgery, but it can also be caused by the tumor, depending on where it is located.

SYMPTOMS



- A feeling of tightness in the face, head, or neck
- Changes in vision or hearing
- Pain in the ears
- Difficulty breathing, swallowing, eating, or speaking
- Discomfort (aching, tingling, numbness) in the face, head, or neck
- Swelling in the face, head, or neck (internal or external)
- Pain, stiffness, or decreased range of motion in the neck or shoulders
- Feeling congested

REDUCING THE RISK

- Prevent injury and infection to the head and neck
- Avoid tight clothing, scarves, and jewelry around the neck
- Use proper body mechanics and sleeping positions
- Exercise and maintain a healthy weight
- Protect your skin and keeping it moisturized



TREATING LYMPHEDEMA

- Manual lymphatic drainage (gentle, circular massage strokes that promote the flow of lymph fluids out of the area)
- Pneumatic compression pumps, or compression bands or garments worn around the chin, face, and head that help fluids to be reabsorbed by the body
- Exercises to strength muscles and increase range of motion in the neck and shoulders
- Self-care including techniques to reduce your risk of worsening lymphedema

