

# TREATING LYMPHEDEMA

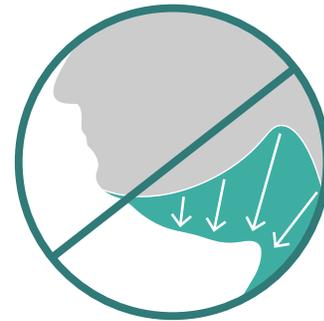
If you have radiation or surgery for your head and neck cancer, you will be at risk of developing lymphedema (swelling in your face, head, neck or nearby areas). Lymphedema is very common, with more than 75% of patients experiencing symptoms after treatment for their cancer. Lymphedema can be internal (occurring in the mouth, tongue, throat, voice box, or airway) or it can be external (occurring in the neck or face). Some patients experience both.

## MANAGING LYMPHEDEMA

Ask to have a Certified Lymphedema Therapist (CLT) and/or Speech-Language Pathologist on your medical team. These professionals can offer strategies to lower your risk of developing lymphedema, as well as treating and managing any lymphedema that occurs.

If lymphedema does occur, your medical team will likely recommend Complete Decongestive Therapy (CDT), which includes:

- **Manual Lymphatic Drainage:** Applying gentle, circular massage strokes to promote lymphatic flow
- **Compression:** Wearing compression bands or garments around the chin, face, and head to support the soft tissues, reduce swelling, and encourage the body to reabsorb excess fluid
- **Exercise:** Strengthening muscles, increasing range of motion, and providing muscle contraction and movement that promotes lymphatic flow
- **Self-Care:** Incorporating daily strategies to reduce the risk of worsening lymphedema, including how to perform recommended treatments at home



Self-care strategies may include:

- Exercise and stretching
- Being conscious of proper body posture, sleeping positions, and apparel choices
- Skin care and preventing injury and infection
- Maintaining a healthy weight and proper nutrition
- Taking care with medications

## WHEN TO TALK TO THE DOCTOR

- Always talk over any concerns about your lymphedema with your medical team. Be sure to contact your provider right away if
- Any part of your head or neck (internal or external) suddenly swells, looks red, or feels hot and/or painful.
- You have a temperature not related to a known illness
- You experience new pain with no known cause in the areas affected by lymphedema
- You develop swelling that continues to grow or becomes painful
- Any area of swelling begins to drain pus or other fluids
- You develop swelling that causes breathing difficulty