

CDT treatment

Lymphedema is not curable; however, certain treatment procedures can control the symptoms. Many patients benefit from complete decongestive therapy (CDT) – a reliable, non-invasive treatment that can provide positive, long-term results for both primary and secondary lymphedema. CDT treatment involves:

- Removal of the lymph fluid from the affected region, through gentle, rhythmic massage
- Reduction of the swelling through drainage and bandaging. This may take two to four weeks, depending on the severity. After the swelling is reduced, the patient's self-care becomes important in the success of CDT. Patients should commit to wearing the graduated compression garment to keep the swelling down and continue performing therapeutic exercises and maintaining good skin care.

CDT consists of:

- Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD)
- Good skin care
- Specialized compression bandaging
- Patient specific exercises
- Self-care
- Education in risk-reduction practices

A physician's order is required for treatment, and CDT is covered by a growing number of insurance providers.

Our strong belief in partnership between our therapy team and our patients provides individual attention, helping patients to reach their goals faster.



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Lymphedema
Complete Decongestive
Therapy



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What is lymphedema?

Lymphedema is an accumulation of lymph fluid in the tissue resulting in swelling of arms, legs, breast, neck or trunk. This condition is often neglected and affects both men and women. Many patients benefit from complete decongestive therapy offered at Woodland Heights Medical Center.

Primary lymphedema

Primary lymphedema is a hereditary condition that usually affects the lower extremities. It primarily affects females and develops at puberty – but can appear without warning at any age – usually beginning with gradual swelling at the foot.

Risk factors

- Family history of swollen limbs
- Unexplained swelling of feet or ankles
- Being overweight

Secondary lymphedema

Secondary lymphedema can occur in anyone who has had treatment or injury that damages the lymphatic system. It is most commonly caused by cancer treatments such as surgery to remove lymph nodes, mastectomy, radiation therapy and chemotherapy. Other potential causes include excess weight, circulatory concerns and other conditions that reduce or limit muscle movement.

Risk factors

- Cancer treatment involving lymph node removal or radiation therapy
- Damaged skin or scars from burns, injuries or surgery
- Being overweight
- Joint replacement surgery
- Circulatory problems causing swelling
- Multiple sclerosis, paralysis or other conditions that limit muscle movement

Signs and symptoms

- A “full” sensation in the limb(s), and/or decreased flexibility in a hand, wrist or ankle
- Unusual, unexplained tightness of clothing or jewelry in a specific area
- Persistent swelling in the arm, leg, breast, abdomen, groin or head and neck

Manage your risk

While primary lymphedema is difficult to foresee and prevent, you can limit your risk of secondary lymphedema with a few simple tactics:

- Limit exposure to temperature extremes, such as prolonged, direct sunlight or using a hot tub
- Wear sunscreen when you go outside
- Exercise regularly, but rest the affected limb if it becomes tired – light, regular use of the muscles will help keep them limber and promote blood flow in the area, as well as soften scar tissue

The lymphedema team

The lymphedema team includes licensed therapists who teach individualized self-care and risk-reduction practices, develop patient-specific exercises and perform clinical treatment to include complete decongestive therapy.