

## Liposuction for Lymphedema

### *What to expect and how to prepare*

*This handout explains liposuction when used to treat lymphedema. It includes how to prepare, what to expect, and when to call the clinic.*

### What is liposuction for lymphedema?

*Lymphedema* is ongoing swelling of an area of the body, usually an arm or leg, because the lymphatic system is not working well. It often occurs after lymph nodes have been removed for cancer treatment. Lymphedema can cause fluid swelling in an arm or leg. Over time, it can also cause fatty tissue to build up.

*Liposuction* is surgery that removes fat cells from an area of the body. It involves passing a thin tube called a *canula* under the skin. Liposuction can be used to reduce fat build-up that can occur with lymphedema.

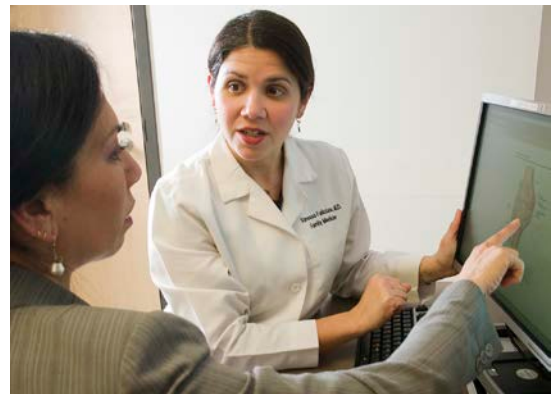
### What can I expect?

You will receive *general anesthesia* (medicine to make you sleep) before the surgery. Then, a fluid with numbing medicine will be injected into your tissue. The canula will then be used to remove excess fat cells from your arm or leg affected by lymphedema.

You can return home the same day, after you recover from the anesthesia. Most people take a few days to 1 week to recover from this surgery. You can resume compression and lymphedema therapies right away if no other lymphedema procedures were done.

### How do I prepare?

- **Medicines:** For 1 week before your surgery, do **not** take any aspirin or other products that affect blood clotting. These include ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) and naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn). To learn more, read the handout “Medicines to Avoid Before Surgery.”



*Ask your doctor if you have any questions about preparing for your surgery.*

- **Shaving:** Do **not** shave any part of your body that you do not already shave every day. If you normally shave near your surgical site, do **not** shave that area for 2 days (48 hours) before your surgery.

## Day Before Surgery

### Reminder Call

A staff person from the pre-surgery clinic will call you by 5 p.m. the night before your surgery. If you are having surgery on a Monday, they will call you the Friday before. If you do not receive this call by 5 p.m., please call 206.598.6334.

The staff person will tell you when to come to the hospital and remind you how to prepare for your surgery. If you have questions, they may forward your call to a pre-surgery nurse or ask you to call your surgeon's nurse.

### Shower

Take a shower the night before your surgery:

- Use the antibacterial soap your nurse gave you to wash your body.
- Do **not** use the antibacterial soap on your face and hair. (Read the directions that came with the soap.) Use your own soap and shampoo on your face and hair.
- Use clean towels to dry off, and put on clean clothing.

## Day of Surgery

### At Home

- **Shower:** Take another shower on the morning of your surgery. Use the antibacterial soap and follow the same instructions as you did for your shower the night before.
- **Medicines:** Follow the instructions you received about what medicines to take and not take before surgery. If you need to take medicines, take them with **only** a small sip of water.
- **Eating:** Follow the instructions you received about what you can eat and drink before surgery.

### At the Hospital

- **Heating blanket:** To lower your risk of infection, you will be covered with a heating blanket to warm your body while you wait to go into the operating room. Please ask for a heating blanket if you do not receive one.

## **Self-care After Surgery**

### **For Your Safety**

Medicine given during and after your surgery will affect you. For 24 hours after your surgery, do **not**:

- Drive, or travel alone
- Use machinery
- Drink alcohol
- Sign any legal papers, or be responsible for the care of another person

### **Shower**

- You may shower 48 hours after your surgery.
- Do **not** take a bath, sit in a hot tub, or go swimming until your surgeon says it is OK.

### **Pain Control**

- Read the “Pain Control after Surgery” handout.
- To help improve your comfort:
  - You may apply a cold pack to the areas where you have had liposuction. Do **not** put ice directly on your skin. Place a clean towel between the cold pack and your skin.
  - Try wearing your compression garment on the arm or leg where the liposuction was done.

### **Activities**

- Return to work when you are comfortable doing so. Most people take a few days to 1 week to recover from this surgery.
- You can resume all your usual activities, including aerobic exercise, about 2 weeks after surgery.

## **What to Expect**

### **Liposuction Area**

- You will have small skin punctures where the liposuction device was passed beneath your skin. Each one may be closed with a small stitch that will dissolve on its own. The punctures may be covered by strips of white tape (Steri-strips).
- Some bloody fluid may drain from these punctures for 24 to 72 hours. You may need to change the dressing over these punctures 2 to 3 times a day until they stop draining.

- Bruises may form at the sites near where you had liposuction. These bruises may be deep in color and take a long time to go away.

## **When to Call**

### **Call 911 or go to the emergency room right away if:**

- You have trouble breathing.

### **Call the clinic or your doctor if you have:**

- Bleeding or drainage that soaks your dressing
- A fever higher than 100.5°F (38°C)
- Shaking and chills
- Any sign of infection in your incision:
  - Redness
  - Increasing pain
  - Swelling
  - Drainage that smells bad
  - A change in the type or amount of drainage
- Nausea or vomiting, or both
- Concerns that cannot wait until your follow-up visit

## **Questions?**

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., call the Center for Reconstructive Surgery at 206.598.1217, and press 8.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206.598.6190 and ask for the resident on call for your surgeon to be paged.