

# LYMPHA Surgery to Prevent Lymphedema

*What to expect and how to prepare*



*This handout explains what to expect, how to prepare, and how to plan for your recovery after the LYMPHA (lymphatic microsurgical preventive healing approach) procedure.*

## What is lymphedema?

The *lymphatic system* is a network of tissues and organs that help remove toxins and waste from your body. It collects excess fluid from your tissues and deposits it in the bloodstream.

*Lymphedema* is tissue swelling that occurs when lymph fluid cannot drain into your blood. It is one problem that can happen after *lymph node dissection*. Lymph node dissection is a cancer surgery that removes some of your lymph nodes.

## What is a LYMPHA procedure?

During a LYMPHA procedure, your surgeon sews the lymphatic channels into a vein. This allows lymph fluid to bypass the area, which can lower the risk of lymphedema.

## When is the LYMPHA procedure done?

The LYMPHA procedure is done at the same time as your lymph node dissection.

## How to Prepare

- We will measure your affected arm(s) or leg(s) during your consult with your surgeon's team. We will use these "pre-surgery measurements" to track any changes after surgery.
- If you normally shave near your surgical site, do **not** shave that area for 2 days (48 hours) before your surgery.

## Incision Care and Healing

- Remove the outermost (top) bandage 48 hours after surgery, before you shower for the first time. Generally, this dressing is gauze and tape.
- If your incision has strips of white tape (Steri-Strips) over it, leave them in place until they fall off. If the Steri-Strips are still in place when you come to the clinic for your first follow-up visit, your provider will remove them

## Hygiene:

- Please take a shower 48 hours after surgery. We recommend daily showers to reduce the risk of infection.
- Use mild soap and wash your incisions very gently.
- Do not take a bath, sit in a hot tub, or go swimming until your incisions are fully healed and no scabs remain. This may take 4 to 6 weeks.

## Drains

You will have at least 1 drain in your LYMPHA surgical site. We will teach you how to care for your drains. Please read the handout “Caring for your JP Drains” to learn more.

## Activity and Therapy

- For 3 weeks, move your arms gently.
  - Do not raise the arm on the side of your surgery more than 90 degrees (shoulder level).
  - Some patients may need to be more careful with movement. On the day of surgery your surgeon will tell you if you have increased restrictions.
  - If your treatment includes radiation after surgery, you may **carefully** start doing range-of-motion exercises 3 weeks after surgery.
  - You may start physical therapy 3 weeks after surgery if recommended by your provider.
- For 4 weeks:
  - Avoid repetitive arm movements such as chores (vacuuming, doing dishes, and laundry)
  - Avoid aerobic exercise (activities that cause heavy breathing or sustained elevated heart rate)
  - Do **not** lift, push, or pull anything that weighs more than 8 pounds (about the weight of a gallon of milk).
  - Avoid wearing any tight clothing or compression on the surgical leg or arm until 4 weeks after surgery.
- Do **not** use the surgical-side arm for blood pressure checks, IV placements, or lab draws.

## Follow-up Visits

- You will have follow-up visits every 3 months for the first year after surgery.
- After that, you will have follow-up visits every 6 months for an additional 2 years. At those visits, we will measure your affected arm(s) or leg(s) to assess your progress.
- Your provider may recommend additional yearly measurements.

## When to Call

Call the Center for Reconstructive Surgery or your doctor if you have:

- Bleeding or drainage that soaks your dressing (hold pressure on the site to lessen bleeding)
- A fever higher than 100.5°F (38°C)
- Shaking and chills
- Any signs of infection at your incision:
  - Redness
  - Increased swelling
  - Bad-smelling drainage
  - Pus or cloudy-colored drainage
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- New rash

**Redness, swelling, pain, cramping, or warmth, usually in one limb, may be signs of a blood clot. Please go to your local emergency room.**

**If you are experiencing new chest pain or shortness of breath, please call 911 immediately.**

## Questions?

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

**During Clinic Hours (Monday through Friday except holidays, 8am to 5pm):** If you have any questions or concerns, message your surgeon through MyChart. Please include a photo if it will help explain your concern.

You may also call the Center for Reconstructive Surgery at 206.598.1217, option 2.

### **Urgent Needs Outside of Clinic Hours:**

If you have an urgent care need after hours, on weekends, or on holidays, please call 206.598.6190 and ask to speak to the plastic surgeon on call.