

# Treating Lymphedema with Lymphaticovenular Anastomosis

*What to expect and how to prepare*

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*This handout explains what to expect, how to prepare, and how to plan for your recovery from lymphaticovenular anastomosis surgery.*



*Scan with your phone camera for a digital copy of this handout.*

## 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.

## What is lymphaticovenular anastomosis surgery?

*Lymphaticovenular anastomosis* (LVA) surgery connects your lymphatic vessels to your veins. This allows the lymph fluid to drain into your blood vessels. The goal is to reduce lymphedema and swelling, or prevent it from worsening.

You will go home the same day after surgery.

## Incision Care and Healing

- Remove the outer dressing on your surgical site 48 hours after surgery. Do this before you shower for the first time.
- If your incision has strips of white tape (Steri-Strips) over it, leave these in place until they fall off. If they do not fall off on their own, we will remove them during your first follow up appointment.

## 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.

## Compression Garments and Therapy

- For 4 weeks after your surgery do not:
  - Go to lymphedema therapy, perform massage, wear compression sleeves, or use a compression pump.
- You may return to your normal lymphedema care routine after 4 weeks.
- If you wake up in a compression wrap placed at the time of surgery, wear the provided wrap 24/7 for 4 weeks after your surgery. Remove it for showering and laundering.

## Activities and Return to Work

For 4 weeks after your surgery:

- Do not lift, push, or pull anything that weighs more than 8 pounds (about the weight of a gallon of water). This includes children and pets.
- Elevate your arm or leg (surgical side) to heart level as much as possible to prevent swelling after surgery.
- Avoid *aerobic exercise* (activities that cause heavy breathing or sustained elevated heart rate).
- Do **not** fly for 2 weeks after surgery.
- Return to work varies from person to person and depends on the type of work you do. Please discuss with your surgeon what may be best for you.
- Do **not** use the surgical side for blood pressure checks, IV placements, or lab draws for the rest of your life. This will help reduce the risk of lymphedema.

### If your surgical site involves your arm, for 4 weeks:

- Avoid repetitive arm (surgical side) movements such as chores (vacuuming, doing dishes, and laundry).
- Do not raise the arm of the side of your surgery more than 90 degrees (shoulder level).

### If your surgical site involves your leg, for 4 weeks:

- Walking is permitted for short distances (for example, within the household) and for activities of daily living.

## Pain Control

Please read the handout “Pain Control After Reconstructive Surgery.” Please do not use ice or heat on your surgical sites.

## Follow-up Visits

- Your first follow-up visit will be 2 to 3 weeks after surgery.
- You will have other follow-up visits 3 months after surgery to measure your affected arm or leg to assess your progress. Your provider may recommend additional measurements.

## When to Contact the Care Team:

### Call the clinic right away 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/or chills
- Any signs of infection at your surgical site:
  - Redness
  - Increased swelling
  - Bad-smelling drainage
  - Pus or cloudy colored drainage
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- New rash
- Pain that is worsening and is no longer helped by your pain medicine

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

**Please go to the ER (emergency room) if you experience any of these: redness, swelling, pain/cramp, or warmth usually in one limb. Any of these may be signs of a blood clot.**

## 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, we recommend messaging your surgeon through MyChart. Please include a photo if needed.

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 holidays, please call 206.598.6190 and ask to speak to the plastic surgeon on call.