

# Your Lymphedema Consult

*What to expect at your visit*

*This handout explains what to expect when you meet with your surgeon to talk about lymphedema. It describes surgery options and how we check for lymphedema.*

## What is lymphedema?

The *lymphatic system* is a group of organs that help remove toxins and waste from your body. It helps remove extra fluid from your skin and muscles. This extra fluid is called *lymph fluid*, which is a clear liquid that helps carry waste and fight infections.

*Lymphedema* is swelling that happens when lymph fluid cannot drain back into your blood. It can be a problem after *lymph node dissection*, which is a type of cancer surgery that removes some of your lymph nodes.

Lymphedema cannot be cured, but there are treatments that can help manage the symptoms and improve your quality of life. Our clinic specializes in surgical treatments that can help.



***Please talk with your provider about any questions you have.***

## What will happen at my consult visit?

- First we will measure your limbs to see how much swelling you have.
- We will use our *SOZO* device to take an “L-Dex” reading (see details below).
- Your surgeon will talk with you about your treatment options, including surgery.

## How will you measure my limbs?

A medical assistant will take you into an exam room. We will measure either your legs or your arms, depending on where you have swelling. To do this:

- We will measure the *circumference* (distance around) of your limb.
- We will give the numbers to the surgeon and record them in your medical record. If you want a copy of these numbers, please ask.

## What is a SOZO Device?

A SOZO device looks like a scale. It is a quick and non-invasive way to check if you have lymphedema. It sends a small electrical signal through your body and measures how your body resists the current. This gives us information about the fluid levels in your body. It helps us determine if you have lymphedema and gives an *L-Dex score*, which shows how much extra fluid is in your limb.



***SOZO device***



Scan for a digital copy  
of this handout.

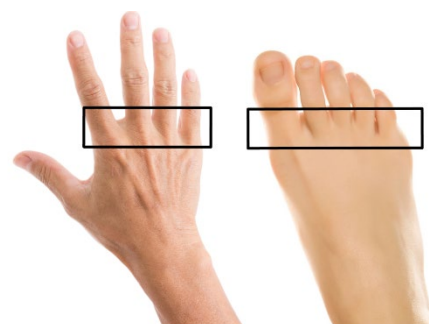
## How do I prepare for the SOZO device?

- Tell our staff if you have a **pacemaker or other implanted electronic device**, or if there is any chance you could be **pregnant**.
- Remove all large jewelry such necklaces, bracelets, and watches. It is OK to wear earrings and piercings, if you have them.
- Remove any coins, phones, or other metal objects from your pockets.
- If you wear compression garments, bring any special equipment you use to take them off or put them on. Before we measure you for lymphedema, we will ask you to remove compression garments.

## Imaging to Assess Lymphedema

### Nuclear Medicine Lymphoscintigraphy

- *Nuclear medicine lymphoscintigraphy* is a scan that is used to check for problems with the flow or drainage of lymph fluid in your body.
- You will get an injection of a small amount of *radioactive tracer* at the *webspace* (space between fingers or toes) of your affected limb. This helps us see how well your lymph fluid is draining.
- Images will be taken after the injection, with each set taking about 30 minutes. Depending on how well your lymph fluid flows, we may ask you to return the next day.
- After your exam, your doctor will talk with you about the results, either during a clinic visit or by phone.



**Example of webspace in hand and foot.**

### MRI Lymphangiogram (MRL)

- An *MRL* is an imaging test used to see and map the lymphatic vessels (paths). This helps doctors decide if you are a good candidate for surgeries like *lymphaticovenous anastomosis* (LVA) and *vascularized lymph node transfer* (VLNT). (See more details about these on page 3).
- You will get an injection of *contrast* (dye) at the webspace of your affected limb. Then you will have an *MRI* (magnetic resonance imaging) test.
- If you have a metal implant, an allergy to gadolinium or iron, or severe kidney disease, you may not be able to have an MRL. Our radiology team will screen you prior to the appointment.
- After your exam, your doctor will talk with you about the results, either during a clinic visit or by phone.

### ICG Lymphography

- Instead of an MRL, your surgeon may recommend ICG (indocyanine green) lymphography. The test helps plan treatments like *lymphaticovenous anastomosis* (LVA) and *vascularized lymph node transfer* (VLNT).
- You will get an injection of *ICG* (indocyanine green) dye at the webspace of your affected limb. A special X-ray machine called a *fluoroscope* will be used to see the lymph vessels. Your surgeon will do this test and will discuss the results during your visit.

## EMLA Cream

- Before any of your imaging appointments, we will give you a prescription for numbing medicine called *EMLA cream* to help reduce pain from the injection.
- You will put this medicine between your fingers or toes 1 hour before your exam. We will tell you where to put the cream, depending on which limb is being examined.
- **Instructions:** Put on a small amount of cream and rub it into your skin. Next, put on a thicker layer and leave it on your skin, without rubbing it in. Cover with plastic wrap if you can. Just before your procedure, remove the cover and wipe off any excess cream.

## Types of Surgery

### Lymphaticovenular Anastomosis (LVA)

- LVA is a surgery that connects a lymphatic vessel to a vein. This allows the lymph fluid to drain into your blood vessels. This can help reduce lymphedema and swelling, or prevent it from getting worse.
- This surgery takes around 5-6 hours. You will be given *general anesthesia* (medicine to make you sleep and not feel pain). You will go home the same day.
- Avoid any lymphedema therapies (pumps, garments, or massage) for 4 weeks. Recovery takes 4 weeks.
- Do **not** fly on an airplane for at least 2 weeks after surgery.

### Vascularized Lymph Node Transfer (VLNT)

- VLNT is surgery that transplants (moves) lymph nodes to the area of lymphedema (*recipient site*) from a different area in the body like the groin or chest, for example (*donor site*). A drain will be placed where the lymph nodes are removed. Transferred lymph nodes will help remove lymph fluid and can support *lymphangiogenesis* (growth of lymphatic vessels).
- This surgery takes around 8 hours. You will be given general anesthesia. You can expect to stay at least 1 night in the hospital.
- Avoid any lymphedema therapies (pumps, garments, or massage) for 4 weeks. Recovery takes 6 weeks.
- Do **not** fly on an airplane for at least 2 weeks after surgery.

### Liposuction (MITE)

- If lymphedema has caused a buildup of fatty tissue on your arm or leg, *liposuction* is a surgery that can help remove it.
- This surgery takes about 2 hours, and you will be given general anesthesia. Some people stay 1 night in the hospital.
- You can start compression therapies right after surgery. Recovery takes 2-4 weeks.
- It is safe to fly on an airplane after this surgery.

### Questions?

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

Call the **Center for Reconstructive Surgery** weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., at 206.598.1217, and press 2.

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