



Banner Health

**Sterling Regional**

MedCenter

*Oncology Rehab*

## *Breast Cancer Related Lymphedema*

### **What is Lymphedema?**

Lymphedema is an abnormal build up of fluid that causes swelling, most often in the arms or legs. The condition develops when lymph vessels or lymph nodes are missing, impaired, damaged, or removed. Two types of lymphedema exist: Primary and Secondary Lymphedema. Lymphedema associated with breast cancer treatment and surgery for breast cancer is considered secondary lymphedema.

### **Who is at risk?**

People who have undergone surgery to remove cancer from the breast with lymph node removal and/or have undergone radiation therapy to the axilla (armpit) are at higher risk for developing upper extremity lymphedema. Lymphedema can occur within a few days, months or years after the insult to the lymph system. Lymphedema should not be confused with the normal amount of swelling that is common during post surgical healing and will not be experienced by everyone who has surgery for breast cancer or radiation therapy.

### **What are the signs and symptoms of upper extremity lymphedema?**

- A “full” or heavy feeling in the arm
- Tightness in the skin of the arm/chest
- Decreased flexibility in the joints of the arm
- Noted tightness in clothing, bracelets, watches or rings that was not noticed before
- Swelling in the arm after airplane travel
- Arm swelling after a minor injury such as a cut, sunburn, or bruise that is inconsistent with the severity of the injury. Swelling may also occur in the back or chest and is found on the same side of the body where cancer was surgically removed and/or treated.

### **What Can I do if I have Upper Extremity Lymphedema?**

If you have concerns that you may have upper extremity lymphedema you need to contact your doctor right away to confirm a diagnosis. Prompt treatment can help get the condition under control and prevent further impairment.

### **What types of treatment options are available?**

Your doctor may refer you to a therapist who specializes in lymphedema management. Treatment options such as complete decongestive therapy include manual lymph drainage, bandaging, exercise and skin care that can assist with management of this condition. With specialized treatment that is tailored to the individual person, the condition of lymphedema can be managed effectively. Sterling Regional MedCenter is proud to offer this specialized treatment completed by an occupational therapist certified in upper extremity lymphedema therapy.

To learn more about our program and to see if you may benefit from our services, please contact us at 970-521-3138.

