

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.