

hollywood physical therapy associates

HEALTH WATCH

Health Watch is a quarterly publication from Hollywood Physical Therapy Associates to raise awareness of important health issues and to underscore the value of quality, personal physical therapy. With proper evaluation, a complete physical therapy program could prevent injury, promote good health maintenance and improve quality of life for certain individuals.

LYMPHEDEMA: MANAGEMENT AND PREVENTION

LYMPHEDEMA is an accumulation of protein rich fluid called lymph that causes a swelling in the spaces just under the skin. This swelling is caused by the lymphatic system's inability to carry away accumulated fluid and often occurs in an arm or leg but can occur anywhere in the body. There are 2 main types of lymphedema referred to as primary and secondary lymphedema.

PRIMARY LYMPHEDEMA is caused by hereditary factors and commonly occurs anytime from birth to age 35. Later onsets are possible but rare.

SECONDARY LYMPHEDEMA is acquired lymphedema and is the more common type. The greatest number of cases of secondary lymphedema are caused by a parasitic infection called Filariasis which is most commonly found in impoverished countries where the weather is very hot. Most cases of secondary lymphedema in the U.S. are caused by the effects of cancer diagnosis and treatment such as lymph node removal and radiation therapy. These are interventions that damage the lymphatic system. Many cases of secondary lymphedema of the legs are caused by venous insufficiency, a common problem of older people who have poor circulation.

It is impossible to quote the number of secondary lymphedema cases in this country because the data varies based on where you derive statistics. Some patients develop lymphedema shortly after cancer treatment, although it can arise at any time in your life if you are at risk. Most cases usually present themselves within the first 2 years following cancer treatment. The greater the number of lymph nodes removed or irradiated, the greater chances for developing lymphedema, however there are many patients who have had aggressive treatment for cancer who do not develop lymphedema.

The **LYMPH SYSTEM** is a one-way circulatory system comprised of lymph glands that produce lymphocytes (lymph cells), graduated lymph vessels, some with one-way pumping valves that send lymph fluid with waste products to the lymph nodes for filtering the protein fluid before it is eliminated from the body via the venous system.

There are 3 STAGES OF LYMPHEDEMA:

Stage I is reversible swelling and usually pits leaving a spongy indentation in the skin for about one minute following direct pressure such as squeezing with the fingers. The sponginess is characteristic of the protein rich fluid called lymph.

Stage II is non-reversible but manageable lymphedema that may leave fibrotic changes in the skin (tough, hard skin) and usually pits less or not at all.

Stage III – lymphostatic elephantiasis is rare and is characterized by severe skin changes and massive swelling of greater than 5 centimeters.

CELLULITIS is a skin infection that can occur with any of the 3 stages of lymphedema because of the stagnant protein rich fluid that sits trapped under the skin serving as a culture medium for infection. It often spreads rapidly and if left untreated with antibiotics it may result in a life threatening situation

The most successful **TREATMENT AND MANAGEMENT** for those with lymphedema or who are at risk involves a conservative program. Those at risk should abide by the following and other common sense guidelines: avoid sun and excessive heat, wear sunblock, protect your skin against cuts and other traumas, avoid cutting cuticles on the affected extremity, increase exercises gradually, avoid tight clothing and jewelry. Patients who have lymphedema are advised to wear specially fitted gradient compression garments on air flights. Other guidelines and additional useful resources are available from The National Lymphedema Network at lymphnet.org or tel. 800-541-3259. Manual lymph drainage and complete decongestive therapy for those who suffer from lymphedema is a 5 part treatment scheme that includes specialized massage techniques, compression bandaging and garment fitting, skin care, prevention education, and remedial exercises. Such a program should be given by a certified lymphedema therapist who has attended a course of 125 hours or more. The National Lymphedema Network has a list of certified programs. Mary Rosenberg, P.T., CLT-LANA and Beate Carriere, P.T., CIFK are certified lymphedema therapists.

Excerpts from a presentation given on November 18, 2003 at UCLA Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center by Mary Rosenberg, P.T., CLT-LANA

Hollywood Physical Therapy Associates was founded by Mary Rosenberg in 1991 to practice a more personal approach to physical therapy. We pride ourselves on delivering professional, comprehensive care to all patients. Our caring staff, private treatment rooms and state-of-the-art facility insures patients will receive the finest care possible.

Specializing in: Lymphedema management, Aquatic physical therapy, Pilates physical therapy, treatment for incontinence, Dance and sports physical therapy, orthopaedic and neurological physical therapy.