FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LYMPHEDEMA
- Surgery or radiation therapy (high risk)
- Surgery and post-operative infection
- Being overweight
- Infections
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Constricting clothing or jewelry
- Dependent limb position
- Recurrent tumor
- Heavy breast prosthesis
- Trauma to the lymphatic system
- Parasite (specific regions of the world)

SYMPTOMS OF LYMPHEDEMA
- Swelling of limb or body part (skin feels more firm)
- Condition worsens over time
- Heaviness and limitation of movement
- Achy/pain in limb
- Repeated infections (cellulitis)
- Skin thickening, lymph leakage through clothes (advanced stages)
- Cosmetic problem (difficulty fitting into clothing)
- Altered lifestyle

Early diagnosis and treatment improves both the prognosis and the condition. Do not ignore even the slightest swelling. Seek medical treatment immediately.

HOW DOES LYMPHEDEMA ENCOURAGE INFECTION?
Lymph fluid is rich in protein. When the flow of the lymphatic system is obstructed, fluid accumulates and becomes stagnant in the limb. This creates a very favorable environment for bacteria to feed and thrive. It is recommended that persons with lymphedema have contact with a physician so that any cuts or signs of infection can be treated immediately.

GENERAL PRECAUTIONS
- Excellent nutrition: low salt, low fat, lots of fresh fruits and vegetables (consult physician if special medical conditions exist)
- Minimize alcohol and nicotine
- Avoid being overweight
- Metabolic health
- Slope with limb wrapped or elevated if possible
- Exercise, swim, walk and special exercises
  - Do not stress yourself
- - Use hypo-allergenic soap and fragrance
- Seek treatment for even the slightest lymphedema/swelling
- Treat infections vigorously
- Avoid high-heeled shoes
- Travel with limb elevated
- Wear compression sleeves/bandage when flying
- Wear gloves when doing housework or gardening
- Use precaution with the use of diuretics (this may remove fluid but not the protein in the channels and your lymphedema may worsen with your body trying to increase fluid to the area to remove the protein)

WARNING!
If you notice a rash, blistering, redness, increase of temperature or fever, see your physician immediately. This could trigger the onset of lymphedema or a worsening of lymphedema.

FOLLOW-UP/MAINTENANCE
- Skin care, MLD, bandaging, compression garment, nutrition and exercise are learned during the course of treatment.
- Follow-up reviews are frequently recommended within six months.
- Continue with your involvement with the Lymphedema Support Group and keep up-to-date with new advances in bandaging and compression garments.

For more information:
- Comprehensive Lymphedema Treatment Center, call 707.257.4089
- Lymphedema Support Group, call the Breast Center 707.257.4047

For a free physician referral:
Call 1.877.QUEEN LINE (1.877.783.3654) or visit www.thequeen.org

“Helping To Heal All We Touch”
WHAT IS LYPHEDEMA?
Lymphedema is a swelling of a body part (face, neck, stomach, lungs, arms, leg) caused by the abnormal accumulation of lymph fluid. It is a chronic and progressive disease that continues to worsen over time when not treated. Lymphedema can usually be brought under control by good care and attention to some lifestyle changes. Lymphedema is usually compatible with a normal and active lifestyle. The condition most often causes a feeling of heaviness, slight discomfort and cosmetic deformity. Repeated episodes of infection may also occur. Although much of the medical community believes lymphedema to be a rare condition, in fact, it affects 2.5 to 4 million people in the United States.

HOW DO I REDUCE THE CHANCES OF DEVELOPING LYPHEDEMA?
If lymph nodes are surgically removed and/or radiation therapy is received, the risk of developing lymphedema is greater. Axillary resection significantly increases occurrence of lymphedema because lymph channels are destroyed. Lymphedema may occur within a few short weeks after surgery or radiation, or 15 to 20 years after treatment.

Avoid Temperature Extremes
• Hot baths, hot tubs, hot showers
• Turkish baths, saunas
• Burns (cooking, smoking, sunburn)
  – Wear oven mitts, use opposite arm, use sunscreen
• Climates (hot or cold) that are extreme changes from your normal climate

Avoid Infections
• Insect bites – Wear protective clothing, gloves, long sleeves, insect repellent
• Manicures, pedicures – Do not cut cuticles
• Injections, blood draws or acupuncture
• Pet scratches
• Skin punctures and cuts – Use electric razor

Avoid Blunt Trauma
• Lifting heavy objects – Carrying heavy handbags or over-the-shoulder straps
• Luggage
  – Restrict weight lifting to 15 pounds or less

1. Hygiene and Topical Skin Products
   • Eliminate bacterial and fungal growth
     – Daily bathing
   • Careful and thorough drying between skin folds, toes and fingers
     – Use of low pH skin lotion twice daily
2. Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD)
   • Specific manual movements along lymphatic pathways that empty and decompress obstructed lymph vessels
   • Up to one hour once or twice daily as needed
   • Facilitates flow of lymph fluid into the venous circulation and allows the limb to return to near normal size
3. Bandaging and Compression
   • Frequently used in combination with MLD
     – “Low” stretch elastic bandages compensate for diminished tissue pressure
   • Prevents affected limb from refilling
   • Bandages are worn frequently at first, less often as treatment progresses
   • At the end of the course of treatment, a ready-made or made-to-measure garment is ordered
4. Remedial Exercises and Evaluation
   • Exercises help to improve flow of lymphedema and improve muscle tone
   • Patients frequently sleep with bandages on
   • Bandaging skills are taught to patient/caregiver during course of treatment