

Cervical Cancer and Limb Swelling

By Alyssa Parker - Acute Wound Care, LLC

The surgical intervention or trauma to the areas of surgery, cancer and tumors often can result in damage to the Lymphatic system. Lymph nodes are a common passageway for carcinogenic cells and often must be removed in whole or in part once cancer has begun to distribute itself throughout the system. For example, patients who have had a hysterectomy along with many lymph nodes removed often experience swelling in the legs. Any swelling in the limbs whatsoever is often indicative of an overloaded lymphatic system.

Lymphedema Often Misdiagnosed as Water Retention

The problem is that the Lymph nodes serve several critical bodily functions, without which, life threatening situations can develop. The Lymphatic system is often referred to as the garbage hauler of the system, and less nodes means less sewer drains which makes it easier for the system to back up. Worse yet, this condition is often misdiagnosed as water retention and the patient has been given diuretics (water pills) as a remedy. Can you imagine trying to fix a clogged sewer pipe by removing just the water? Guess what happens, concentrated waste builds up in the tissues. A possible end result is commonly referred to as Lymphedema, or in this case, the well recognized "post hysterectomy Lymphedema." Needless to say, removing the wastes' only means of transport is not the likely answer.



A Malfunctioning System Interferes with Wound Healing

With normal circulatory function, these waste products are returned via the Lymph nodes and urinated out. In a malfunctioning system, the waste, including iron in the blood, often begins to leach its way into the tissues, since it has nowhere to go, resulting in a brownish bruising of the skin in severe cases. This particular condition is called hemosiderin staining or "port wine" stains of the skin. Left untreated, this stagnant, protein-rich fluid not only causes tissue channels to increase in size and number, but also reduces oxygen availability in the transport system, interferes with wound healing, and provides a culture medium for bacteria that can result in lymphangitis (infection). This is why Lymphedema is also often accompanied by hard to heal wounds.

Consult a Lymphedema Specialist

This condition may have existed for years but a trigger such as the cabin pressurization in a plane flight or sunburn has caused the system to finally overload and the condition manifests itself. What to do? Any swelling or slow wound healing situations should be seen by a specialized professional immediately. Always research your doctor in advance and find one that recognizes and understands the causative factors behind Lymphedema and how to treat it.

Common Effective Treatment

A common effective measure is the Lymphedema pump which massages the effected limb starting with the digits (fingers for example) and squeezes consecutive chambers until the sleeve is completely pressurized. Then the fluid is delivered back into the body for removal normally during urination after treatment. An initial 1 hour treatment often results in an immediate 5-12% reduction in limb volume, and potential regression of the condition if it has not progressed too far.

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