



Arm Precautions

If you have had any surgical procedure for lymph node removal, you need to take good care of your arm. Following the precautions listed below can help decrease your risk for developing lymphedema.

Lymphedema is a chronic condition in which fluid builds up because the lymphatic system is blocked. This fluid buildup causes swelling in an extremity (arm or leg). Early diagnosis and treatment are key for management.

- Do not ignore any changes in your arm(s). If you notice a rash, blisters, redness, increased warmth/heat in the arm and/or pain, please contact your doctor right away.
- Wash all cuts with soap and water and apply an antibacterial ointment such as Bacitracin.
- Keep skin clean and dry. Use alcohol-free and fragrance-free lotions after bathing.
- Avoid cutting your cuticles during manicures. Manicure tools should be sterilized.
- Don't wear tight clothing or jewelry (ex.: bra straps, underwire bras, rings, watches).
- Avoid extreme hot or cold in the area, such as heating pads and ice packs. Wear sun block with SPF 30 or more to prevent sunburn.
- Avoid heavy lifting or carrying, especially with repetitive movements. Carry heavy shoulder bags on the opposite shoulder.
- Use an electric razor for shaving your underarms.
- Wear canvas gloves for gardening, rubber gloves when cleaning, and oven mitts when taking hot pots or casseroles out of the oven.
- Have blood pressure readings, blood drawing, injections and vaccinations done on the opposite arm whenever possible. **NOTE: *If lymph nodes have been removed from both arms, you can have blood pressure readings and blood drawing done but you should alternate the arm used. It is still important to follow the other necessary precautions.***

For questions and information about exercise after breast surgery or lymphedema, please contact Rusk Institute's Outpatient Physical Therapy Department for Women's Health at (212) 263-5601.