



### Stop Swelling Before it Becomes Irreversible Lymphedema

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Lymphedema is a painful, emotionally taxing condition suffered by more than half a million Americans.<sup>1</sup> Irreversible lymphedema occurs when the lymphatic system is damaged to the extent that interstitial fluid production exceeds the lymphatic system's capacity to filter and transport. In most cases of secondary lymphedema, surgery and/or radiation often did not cause all the damage necessary to create irreversible lymphedema. In many cases, these procedures only started the process. The subsequent swelling triggers an inflammation-like response that, when inadequately addressed, can permanently degrade the lymphatic system. When prescribed prophylactically, as few as two timely sessions of manual lymphatic drainage at **Enfield Health & Wellness Center** can help your patient manage harmful swelling after surgery or radiation. After lymphedema is established, maximal decongestion can often be achieved in 10 visits for upper extremities or 20 visits for lower extremities.



In the United States, lymphedema usually develops following disruption or obstruction of lymphatic pathways due to surgery, radiotherapy, or disease process.<sup>2</sup> The most common scenario is lymphedema following surgery for breast cancer.

**Pathophysiology:** After an initial insult to the lymphatic drainage system, protein-rich fluid accumulates in the tissues (usually upper or lower extremities). Protein-rich swelling or edema causes the accumulation of lipoperoxides that attract defense cells. The defense response results in fibroblasts producing more connective tissue and lipid-storing adipocytes. This can result in the fibrosclerosis typical of lymphedema and proliferation of fatty tissue.<sup>3</sup>

Publicity for manual lymphatic drainage techniques often focuses on the dramatic effects achieved with moderate to severe lymphedema. However, by managing post-surgical swelling **before** the defense response causes further damage, manual lymphatic drainage works to prevent swelling from progressing to irreversible lymphedema. Research involving lymphoscintigraphies has demonstrated that manual lymphatic drainage stimulates accessory routes useful for resorption of lymph.<sup>4</sup> Numerous studies have demonstrated the safe efficacy of complete decongestive therapy<sup>5-8</sup> and of manual lymphatic drainage alone<sup>4,9-13</sup> (without compression garments). **Prescribe a short course of manual lymphatic drainage soon after surgery to prevent progressive damage to the lymphatic system and to enhance what capacity remains in the system.**

**Please let your patients know that Enfield Health & Wellness works to prevent lymphedema and helps manage existing cases of lymphedema.**

### Jennifer Meier, MPT, Certified Lymphedema Therapist



Jen is trained in the Casley-Smith method for lymphedema management. She can help breast cancer patients with scar management, posture correction, manual lymphatic drainage, fitting of decompression garments, and more. Jennifer attained her physical therapy license in 1996. Since then she has been trained in Mulligan Technique, McKenzie Technique, Muscle Energy Technique and more and has used these techniques for surgery patients, minor league athletes, work injury patients, and others.

**Please refer your patients to Enfield Health & Wellness Center**  
Doctor Recommended, Patient Preferred

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