

MAKE A MOVE AGAINST LYMPHEDEMA

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A MILD SWELLING YOU NEGLECT CAN BE A PREDICTOR OF A LIFE-LONG CONDITION

What is lymphedema?

The lymph fluid, rich in protein, protects our body from microbes, disposes of cellular waste and helps our immune system. And the lymphatic system regulates the amount of this fluid inside the body. The circulation of lymph fluid within body is realized by lymphatic ducts. Unlike the blood circulation, lymphatic system does not have any mechanism similar to heart and arteries to ease the circulation. Instead, the circulation of the lymph fluid through the lymphatic ducts are enabled by our movements during the day. If the lymph fluid accumulated in the body exceeds the capacity of our lymphatic system, lymphedema, known as elephant disease colloquially, develops.

What are the symptoms?

Lymphedema may develop in the face, arms, legs, abdomen and the chest wall, and its symptoms are as follows

- Swelling in certain areas
- Restriction of movement in swelled areas
- Pain in armpits, groin and rigid areas
- Tightness in the skin, nodules and rigidity
- Sense of weight
- Sense of discomfort
- Tekrarlayan ataklarla enfeksiyonlar
- Color change in the skin, thickening, rigidity in the arms or legs
- Severe swelling; elephant disease
- Open wound in the lymphedema skin

How does it develop?

Especially during the cancer treatment, lymphedema can develop due to the damaged lymph nodes and lymphatic duct by surgical interventions or radiation therapy. In addition, congenital lymphatic system disorder and conditions that may affect the lymphatic system such as infection, trauma and injury may cause lymphedema. The most common reason is the obstruction of lymphatic duct due to cancer or the removal of lymph nodules during a cancer surgery.

Obstructed Lymph Nodes Can Swell Arms and Legs

Cancer alone may cause obstruction in the lymph nodes or the tumors grown near the lymph nodes may cause the lymph fluid to be discharged by compressing the lymph nodes. During the cancer treatment, in addition to the surgery, radiation therapy can also cause swelling in the arms or legs by obstruction the lymphatic ducts or lymph nodes. Not everyone receiving cancer treatment develops lymphedema. However, if the cancer patients is of an advanced age, or has a history of obesity and infection.

There May Be Fever Episodes

Lymphedema may involve one arm or leg, or it may have a bilateral involvement. A part or whole of the arm or leg may swell. In some cases, only the fingers swell. The patient can feel weight, pain and restriction of movement in the lymphedema side. Another complaint is the recurrent infections. Since the lymph circulation is deteriorated, the lymph fluid accumulates and this fluid, which is highly suitable for bacterial infection and for microbial growth, easily triggers infection. When infection develops, lymphedema side swells more and the patient suffers from pain, redness and fever episodes with shivering. Especially after a cancer treatment, if even a mild swelling is noticed in the arm or leg, the treatment must be initiated immediately. Early diagnosis of lymphedema increase the treatment success rates.

Regular Exercise is Crucial

Lymphedema requires a long treatment and early diagnosis is very important for a successful treatment. Therefore, the doctor and the patient must be very close and in constant collaboration. Exercise is very important in the lymphedema treatment. These exercises must be taught by physiotherapists who are trained on lymphedema, and moves must not be excessively tiresome. The prescribed exercises should mimic the daily movements.

How to Do Bandaging and Massage

The most important part of the lymphedema treatment is the compression therapy. A complete bandaging covering the whole limb starting from the fingers will reduce the volume of the lymphedema limb. This is generally performed by an expert physiotherapist. Again, a massage therapy to be performed by an experienced physiotherapist can reduce this volume, too. Bandaging and massage opens alternative lymphatic ducts that are normally closed. After the volume reduction, special devices that pump air episodically and enable the lymph fluid to be stroked upwards and compression clothes are very important for the continuation of the treatment.

Current Treatments

Together with early diagnosis, new generation compression pumps, laser applications and surgical interventions provide highly successful results in lymphedema treatment. Now, with highly educated and experienced team, lymphedema has become a chronic disease that does not have any significant impact on the quality of life of the patients.

