

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

### Lymphedema (Swelling of the arm)

During breast cancer surgery, some of the axillary lymph nodes (under your arm) may be removed to check for cancer cells. When axillary lymph nodes are removed or treated with radiation therapy, lymph vessels can become blocked. This increases the chance of lymphedema.

[Lymphedema](#) can cause swelling of the arm or hand on the same side as your surgery. Most cases of lymphedema won't go away completely. However, treatment can improve movement and reduce pain and swelling in the affected arm. There are also things you can do that may reduce your risk of getting lymphedema.

You may be overwhelmed or unsure of what to ask your doctor about lymphedema. Here are some questions to help start the conversation.

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**Q:** What are my chances of getting lymphedema? How will you check for it?

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
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**Q:** What are the signs of lymphedema? When should I report them to you?

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
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**Q:** Are there things I can do to prevent lymphedema (i.e., exercises or activities)? Are there things I should avoid (i.e., blood pressure checks, blood draws or shots) in the arm that's on the same side as my surgery?

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Q:** How can I care for my skin?

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Q:** If I get a cut, burn or insect bite on the arm that's on the same side as my surgery, what should I do?

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q: How is lymphedema treated?

A: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q: What is a compression sleeve? Should I wear one? If so, where can I get one? Do I have to wear it all the time?

A: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q: What is manual lymph drainage (MLD)? What about complex decongestive therapy? Please explain how these treatments work.

A: \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_

Q: Do you recommend physical therapy and/or exercise? If so, how do I get started?

A: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Notes:

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For more information on breast health or breast cancer, please call the Patient Care Center's Breast Care Helpline 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET and Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET or visit [komen.org](http://komen.org). Susan G. Komen does not provide medical advice.

**1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) [komen.org](http://komen.org)**