



Breast Cancer-related Lymphoedema Screening



Changi
General Hospital

SingHealth

What is lymphoedema?

The lymphatic system plays several critical roles including:

- Clearing excess fluid from the soft tissue in the body
- Providing immunity to fight infections
- Supporting the breaking down of fats (fat metabolism)

Lymphoedema is a condition where lymphatic fluid builds up in the body's tissues. When lymphoedema develops, the body's lymphatic functions are disrupted, leading to swelling, fat deposition, firmness from fibrosis (scarring), and an increased risk of soft tissue infections, which may worsen the condition, resulting in more frequent infections.

It most commonly develops in the arms or legs, and can occur after lymph node removal or damage to the lymphatic vessels or lymph nodes during cancer treatment.

Breast cancer patients may be at higher risk of developing breast cancer-related lymphoedema, after undergoing a mastectomy and axillary lymph node dissection.



Why early detection is crucial?

Early detection and treatment of lymphoedema can:

- ➔ Enable timely treatment with simpler interventions such as manual lymphatic drainage (massage), compression therapy or small day surgeries for faster recovery and minimal downtime.
- ➔ Relieve symptoms of swelling and discomfort and improve quality of life.
- ➔ Reduce reliance on compression garments.
- ➔ Lower the risk of complications like infections.
- ➔ Prevent progression of the disease to more advanced stages which has higher rates of recurrences and may be harder to treat.



About the lymphoedema screening and surveillance programme

The CGH lymphoedema screening and surveillance programme is a structured programme designed for early detection and timely treatment of breast cancer-related lymphoedema.

As breast cancer treatment (e.g., radiotherapy or surgery) involves the lymph nodes and major lymph vessels, patients are at higher risk of developing lymphoedema. The programme is therefore integrated with breast cancer management, with specialists in Breast Surgery, Medical Oncology, Radiation Oncology and Plastic Surgery working closely together.



Initial assessment and scanning

Six months after surgery, patients will be scheduled for an appointment with the lymphoedema nurse and clinician. At this visit, baseline measurements will be taken, and a screening lymphography of the arms will be performed.

These measurements may include:

- Arm circumference/volume
- Quality of life assessment
- Body mass index (BMI)
- Bioimpedance spectroscopy (to measure the body's fluid distribution and body cell mass)
- Indocyanine green lymphography (to map out the lymphatic vessels)



The initial assessment will be thorough to establish a good baseline, and may take half a day to complete. If early signs of lymphoedema are detected, treatment protocol will be initiated.

Regular check-ups

Follow-up appointments will be scheduled every six months after the initial assessment. Physical examinations will be conducted to monitor the arm and shoulder for any signs of swelling or changes.



Cultivate good lifestyle habits and self-monitor at home

- **Skin care:** Keep your skin clean and moisturised to prevent infections.
- **Exercise:** Engage in gentle exercises to promote lymphatic drainage, such as shoulder rolls, arm circles, wrist bends and finger stretches.
- **Avoid strain:** Refrain from heavy lifting or repetitive activities on the affected side.
- **Daily self-checks:** Check for signs of lymphoedema, such as swelling, tightness, or changes in the skin on your arm and maintain a daily log of any symptoms or changes noticed.
- **Seek medical attention:** Report significant changes such as any signs of swelling, tightness, or discomfort to your doctor.

If you experience any of the following symptoms, please go to the Emergency Department immediately:



Significant redness or swelling



Severe warmth or tenderness in the affected area



Rapidly increasing discomfort or pain



Fever or chills

How you can play a part in your care

Your active participation in this screening and surveillance programme is vital. Here's how you can achieve the best outcome from this programme:

- **Attend all scheduled appointments:** Regular monitoring is key to early detection and treatment.
- **Report any changes immediately:** If you notice swelling, tightness, or discomfort, inform your healthcare professional promptly.

Remember, early detection and proactive management is the best defence against lymphoedema. Let's work together to maintain your health and well-being.



Singapore General Hospital



Changi General Hospital



Sengkang General Hospital



KK Women's and Children's Hospital



National Cancer Centre Singapore



National Dental Centre Singapore



National Heart Centre Singapore



National Neuroscience Institute



Singapore National Eye Centre



SingHealth Community Hospitals



Polyclinics SingHealth

PATIENTS. AT THE HEART OF ALL WE DO.®

2 Simei Street 3 Singapore 529889
Tel: (65) 6788 8833 Fax: (65) 6788 0933
Reg No 198904226R

CGH Appointment Centre

For appointments and enquiries,
please call: (65) 6850 3333

Operating hours:
8.30am to 5.30pm (Mondays to Fridays)
8.30am to 12.30pm (Saturdays)
Closed on Sundays and Public Holidays

For more information, please visit **www.cgh.com.sg**



facebook.com/ChangiGeneralHospital

Information is valid as of February 2025 and subject to revision without prior notice.

All information provided within this publication is intended for general information and is provided on the understanding that no surgical and medical advice or recommendation is being rendered. Please do not disregard the professional advice of your doctor.