



# 10 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT PREVENTING CHRONIC, CANCER-RELATED LE OF THE ARMS AND LEGS

## 01

### CHRONIC CANCER-RELATED LYMPHEDEMA (LE) IS A LIFELONG CONDITION

Lymphedema (LE) occurs when the lymphatic system that removes waste from the body becomes damaged or impaired. Fluid builds up and causes swelling in your arms, legs, hands, or feet. Your arm, leg, hand, or foot may feel heavy, feel tight, or be hard to move. If left untreated, lymphedema may lead to complications including infection. You may have to manage lymphedema with therapy or lifestyle modification for the rest of your life.

## 02

### THE RISK OF GETTING LYMPHEDEMA DEPENDS ON YOUR CANCER TYPE AND TREATMENT

Up to 10 million Americans are estimated to have lymphedema—seven million of which are a result of cancer treatment. This includes the following percent estimates: breast (30%); sarcoma (30%); gynecological (20%); melanoma (16%); genital urinary (10%); head and neck (75%). Cancer treatments such as surgery, radiation, or chemotherapy can increase your risk of getting lymphedema.

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### CANCER-RELATED LYMPHEDEMA IS PREVENTABLE

Cancer-related lymphedema of the arms and legs develops in stages. When it is caught early, before you feel or can measure noticeable swelling, it can be treated and stopped before it gets worse and becomes a lifelong condition.

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### EARLY DETECTION IS CRITICAL

In order to prevent the development of chronic lymphedema, it must be caught early before you notice much swelling. In order to catch lymphedema early, you must be routinely tested when you see your doctor or therapist. *Bioimpedance spectroscopy* (BIS) is one method used by doctors and therapists to help find signs of lymphedema early, before you notice symptoms yourself.

## 05

### PREVENTION STARTS BEFORE CANCER TREATMENT BEGINS

Measurements of your arms or legs before cancer-treatment begins gives your doctor or therapist a baseline value of what is normal for you. Any changes after your cancer treatment can be compared to your baseline measurement. This way, your doctor or therapist can detect lymphedema at the earliest possible stage.

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### AT-HOME THERAPY CAN HALT THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRONIC LYMPHEDEMA

If your doctor or therapist finds signs of early lymphedema, they may prescribe at-home treatment. Your treatment plan may include wearing compression garments, light stretching, or self-massage.

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### EVIDENCE SUPPORTS EARLY DETECTION AND TREATMENT

Clinical trials have shown that early detection and treatment of cancer-related lymphedema can prevent it from becoming a chronic condition.

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### LEADING GUIDELINES RECOMMEND A PREVENTION MODEL-OF-CARE

Early detection and treatment of lymphedema to improve patient outcomes is recommended in multiple clinical practice guidelines, including: American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), *eviCore Clinical Guidelines for Physical and Occupational Therapy Service*, National Accreditation Program for Breast Centers (NAPBC), National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines for Breast Cancer, National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Guidelines for Survivorship, and National Lymphedema Network (NLN).

## 09

### PREVENTION IS HAPPENING NOW

Many cancer treatment centers, both large and small, have implemented programs to prevent cancer patients from getting chronic lymphedema. LE&RN's *Centers of Excellence* are required to offer risk reduction and surveillance programs for high risk patients and assessment tools such as *perometry* or *Bioimpedance spectroscopy* (BIS). Learn more: [LE&RN Centers of Excellence](#)

## 10

### RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU

Now that you know more about preventing cancer-related lymphedema of the arms or legs, you can be prepared to talk to your doctor or therapist. Print this list, take it with you to your next visit, and ask what they will do to reduce the risk that you develop chronic lymphedema following your cancer treatment.

