

# Exercise with Arm Lymphedema

Swelling can limit the movement of muscles and joints. Having full movement in our muscles and joints is needed for our lymph system to work well.

## Why is exercise important?

Swelling can limit the movement of muscles and joints. Having full movement in our muscles and joints is needed for our lymph system to work well. The National Lymphedema Network recommends daily exercise for all people with lymphedema. Exercise will not make lymphedema worse. In fact, exercising and stretching:

- Makes your heart, lungs and lymphatic system work better
- Builds muscle
- Manages body weight
- Helps your joints move better
- Makes you feel better

There are general guidelines and safety precautions you should follow when starting a new exercise program. You will work with an occupational or physical therapist (OT/PT) on an exercise program that is right for you.

## Exercise Tips

- Wear your bandages or compression garment during exercise:  
Yes  No
- Start slowly, and increase the amount of sets (times per day), repetitions, or weights gradually.
- Stop exercising if you feel pain, or have more swelling or discomfort.
- Drink a lot of water!
- Avoid extreme heat and overheating.
- During one exercise session, do a few exercises from each category below.

## Get moving! (Walk, ride a bike, swim, or jog)

Walk/ Jog/ Bike/ Swim for \_\_\_\_\_ minutes, \_\_\_\_\_ times per day.

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Tips:

- Progress slowly. Add 1 to 2 minutes to your exercise session each day.
- Breathe deeply while walking to wake up (stimulate) your lymphatic system.

**Get strong!**

Use a \_\_\_\_-pound weight. Do \_\_\_\_\_ repetitions, \_\_\_\_\_ times per day.

**Tips:**

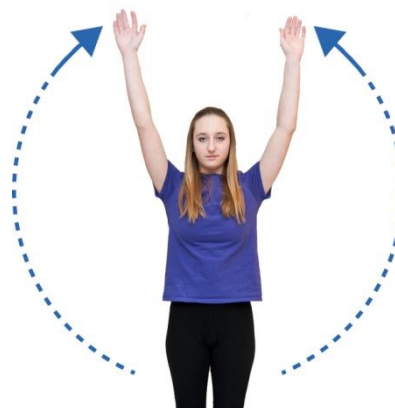
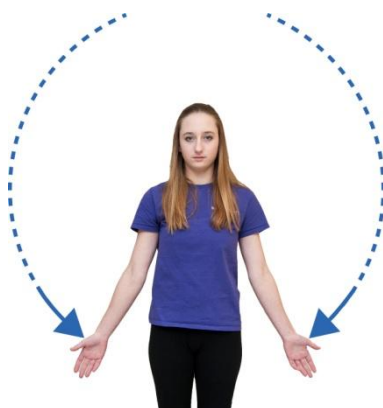
- Start with light weights and low repetitions. Slowly increase the amount of repetitions or weight.
- Avoid weights that wrap tightly around (constrict) your arms, legs or clothing.



Hand Squeezes



Wrist Curls



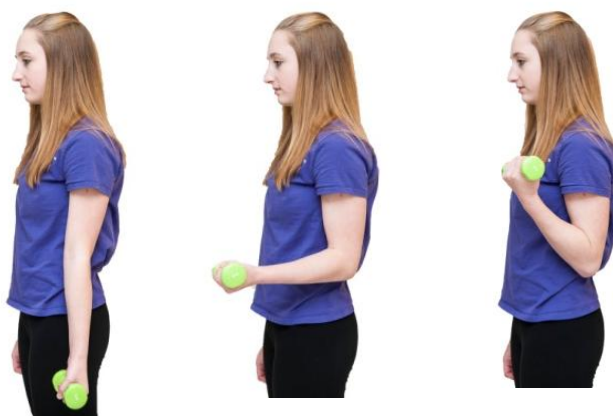
Snow Angels

## Exercise with Arm Lymphedema

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Standing Overhead Hitchhiker



Bicep Curls

### Stretch it Out!

Hold stretches for \_\_\_\_\_ seconds. Repeat \_\_\_\_\_ times per day.

#### Tips:

- Stretch slowly and progress gradually.
- If you have tight muscles or scars from surgery or radiation you may need a specialized stretching program or help from an OT/PT before starting self-stretches.

## Exercise with Arm Lymphedema

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### To Learn More

- Occupational/  
Physical Therapy  
206-987-2113
- Ask your child's  
healthcare provider
- [www.seattlechildrens.org](http://www.seattlechildrens.org)



**Arm Circle Swings**



**Standing Doorway Stretch**



### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.



**Standing Overhead Shoulder Stretch**



**Cross Arm Stretch**

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Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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