Precautions To Observe With Lymphedema

Observe the following precautions:

- Protect the arm from being scratched, burnt or cut.
- Do not allow injections, blood drawn or IVs in the involved arm.
- Avoid close contact with pets that have claws and there is the risk of scratching.
- Wear gloves when gardening.
- Wear an oven mitt when handling hot items in the kitchen.
- Sew with a thimble to avoid pricking your fingers.
- Use an electric shaver with a narrow head for shaving your underarms. Use care when shaving.
- Do not use artificial nails and use your own tools when receiving a manicure.

Heat is harmful to the affected limb. Protect your involved arm and avoid:

- Exposure to the sun to prevent getting a sunburn.
- Wear long sleeves or your compression garment.
- The heat from saunas, hot tubs or steam rooms may aggravate the swelling in your arm.

Avoid compression of the affected arm.

- Do not allow anyone to take blood pressures on the affected arm.
- Wear loose clothing and do not wear tight clothes with elastic bands at the wrist.
- Do not wear jewelry on the affected arm/hand.

Also, avoid intense activity of the affected arm, cleaning or exercise program with high repetitions or high weights.

Avoid lifting heavy packages or luggage with the affected arm. Use luggage on wheels or carrying items with the unaffected arm.

Avoid things that could irritate your skin such as harsh chemicals, insect bites or poison ivy.

Be aware that airplane travel can aggravate your swelling. Always wear your compression garment when you travel by airplane.

Lymphedema, a swelling of the arm, can occur if you have had lymph nodes removed during the surgical procedure and/or from radiation therapy. The lymphatic system drains lymph, a protein rich fluid, from the tissues and conducts the fluid in a unidirectional flow back to the circulatory system. Lymphedema results when there is a blockage in the drainage and there is an abnormal accumulation of lymph fluid. Untreated lymphedema may lead to weakness, stiffness, pain, numbness, pain, loss of function and impaired body image. Lymphedema can range from mild to severe, it can temporary or permanent and it can occur immediately or several years after your surgery.

Lymphedema treatment, even years after the lymphedema develops, can reduce the size and swelling of the arm. The physical therapy department at SJH RehabCare provides treatment for the management of lymphedema. The treatment consists of manual lymph drainage, compression bandaging, exercise, and education about preventive care. The goal of therapy is to decrease the swelling in the arm, assist the patient with getting fit with a compression garment to maintain the decrease in swelling and improve the patient’s function.