



Alberta Lymphedema
Association

5 THINGS PHYSICIANS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT LYMPHEDEMA

1 What is lymphedema?

Lymphedema is a chronic and progressive inflammatory disease caused by a build-up of protein-rich interstitial fluid.

2 What are the types of lymphedema?

Primary Lymphedema occurs due to a genetic predisposition to lymphatic dysfunction. It may develop at birth or later in life. Secondary Lymphedema can occur as a result of an injury, infection, radiation, or surgery that damages the lymphatic system.

3 Signs and Symptoms

Swelling, heaviness, tightness, fullness or heat within the affected region. Patients may develop pain, aching, tingling, or decreased mobility.

4 Treatments

Lymphedema cannot be treated with medications. Management strategies focus on physical therapy to manually transport accumulated lymph fluid out of the affected region. Therapies include: lymphedema-specific compression garments, bandaging, and manual lymphatic drainage by a Certified Lymphedema Therapist (Combined Decongestive Therapy), education on skin-care, and light exercise.

5 Complications

• Cellulitis • Psychosocial implications • Financial burden • Mobility limitations • Impaired sensation • Chronic pain