

Lymphedema and Air Travel

People at risk for lymphedema are those who do NOT yet have signs and symptoms of lymphedema but have a known problem with their lymphatic system. At-risk people include those who have had removal of lymph nodes or radiation therapy. These raise the risk for getting lymphedema. At-risk individuals have lower lymphatic function that may block the body's ability remove extra fluid.

1. People at risk should pay close attention to changes in how their arms and legs feel. They should watch for heaviness, fullness or aching that may signal the start of lymphedema from an airline flight.
2. People who are at risk for lymphedema should consider compression to the affected arm or leg while flying. A medical compression garment should be sized by a health care worker who is experienced in garment fitting.
3. When flying, move arms and legs often to help prevent swelling. Standing and moving around the cabin often to increase the movement of fluid and help prevent buildup.
4. Using roller bags or having assistance with bags is recommended. Lifting and carrying luggage may cause stress on muscles in an involved arm and increase the risk of swelling. Bags with shoulder straps can cut across lymphatics in the arm and increase the risk of swelling.
5. Drinking plenty of fluids can reduce the risk of swelling. The cabin of a plane is dry and may cause dehydration which can increase swelling.

Guidelines for air travel for people with confirmed Lymphedema:

Compression Garments

- Obtain a well-fitted compression sock or arm sleeve well before the trip.
 - For arm lymphedema, compression should be at least 20-30mmHg. A hand piece should be worn with the compression sleeve.
 - For leg lymphedema, compression should be at least 30-40mmHg.
- Wear the compression sock or arm sleeve several times before the trip to make sure it fits and is comfortable.
- Put compression sock or sleeve on before take-off and leave on for 1-3 hours after landing to allow pressure to return to normal.

Seat Assignment, Airport Regulations:

- People with leg lymphedema should consider a seat with more leg room or a first class seat.
- A doctor's note about your lymphedema may help explain your bandages or compression garments to security.

Activity:

- Do not carry bags or use shoulder straps on the swollen arm.
- Use roller bags or find help for carrying and lifting luggage.
- Wear loose fitting clothing.
- Move around the cabin often.
- Throughout your trip:
 - Try to avoid activities that increase swelling.
 - Take frequent breaks for rest and elevation.
 - Get enough sleep.

Dietary and Medical Concerns:

- Make sure to drink water often during your flight and throughout your trip.
- Eat healthy foods.
- Reduce alcohol, caffeine and salty foods.
- Consider bringing antibiotics with you if:
 - Travelling outside the U.S.
 - You have a history of cellulitis.
- Wear a LYMPHEDEMA ALERT bracelet or necklace.