

LYMPHEDEMA

WHAT IS LYMPHEDEMA?

To understand lymphedema you should know a little about the lymph system. The lymph system is a system of the body made up of lymph nodes and lymph vessels that has two main functions. One is the function of fighting infection and disease. The other is to assist the circulatory system to remove fluid from tissues in the body.

Lymphedema is a type of edema, or swelling that occurs due to the lymph system of the body not functioning properly. It can affect any part of the body including the arms, legs, trunk, genitals, head, and face. Lymphedema is different from regular edema because the fluid in the tissues contains lots of proteins. This protein-rich fluid cannot be absorbed by the venous system. As a result, usual measures of rest, ice and elevation used to treat edema are not effective in treating lymphedema.

WHAT CAUSES LYMPHEDEMA?

Sometimes lymphedema is caused by a deformity of the lymph system. This may present at birth or years later. This type of lymphedema is called primary lymphedema. A more common type of lymphedema is secondary lymphedema. It may be caused by surgery, radiation, or cancer of lymph nodes. It can also be due to trauma, infection or severe chronic venous insufficiency. Lymphedema may occur immediately or may occur years after the lymph system is damaged. Without treatment it can progress to unimaginable proportions and often results in wounds on the skin.

WILL IT GO AWAY?

Lymphedema that is caused by damage or inflammation of lymph nodes will never completely go away because the nodes cannot heal themselves. However, with proper treatment, lymphedema can be managed and people with lymphedema can lead normal lives. Management should begin as soon as possible and will continue for life.

SO, WHAT CAN BE DONE TO TREAT IT?

Currently, there are no medications that have been proven to treat lymphedema. Likewise, there are no surgical procedures that can correct or repair the lymph system. The most effective treatment to date is Complete Decongestive Therapy, or CDT. CDT includes manual lymph drainage, or MLD, which is performed by a specially trained therapist. It also includes compression bandaging, skin care, and exercise.

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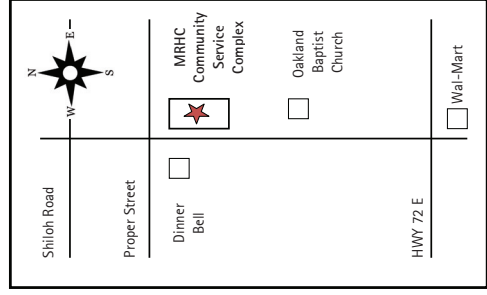
Magnolia Regional Health Center Outpatient Rehabilitation Department now offers Complete Decongestive Therapy (CDT) and has a Certified Lymphedema Therapist on staff. Anyone with a diagnosis of lymphedema that is not currently being managed could benefit from CDT. Also, anyone that has had surgical removal of lymph nodes or radiation damage to lymph nodes that has NOT YET developed lymphedema could benefit from an evaluation. Education could help prevent the development of lymphedema in the future.

Individuals who feel they could benefit from CDT should talk to their physician and request a Physical Therapy referral. The referral should be for CDT and should include a diagnosis of lymphedema of a particular area or areas.

Medicare and most commercial insurances do cover CDT for lymphedema with the appropriate referral.

Sherry Johnson, PT, CLT is a graduate of the University of Tennessee with a B.S. in Physical Therapy. She has practiced physical therapy for 13 years. Sherry received her Certification as a Lymphedema Therapist from the Academy of Lymphatic Studies in August of 2007.

Please feel free to contact Sherry with any questions regarding the Lymphedema Management Program at 662-287-1400.



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The Outpatient Rehabilitation Department is located in the MRHC COMMUNITY SERVICE COMPLEX at 1001 South Harper Road, Corinth, Mississippi.

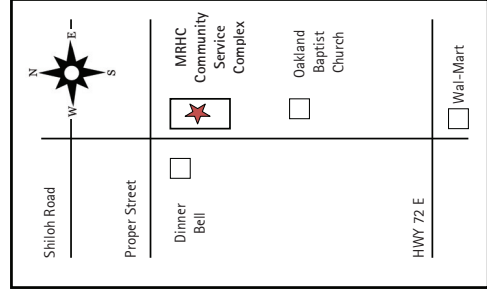
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