

## Liposuction to Manage Lymphedema

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Your lymphatic (lymph) system is an important part of your body's immune system. Your lymphatic system is made up of lymph vessels, lymph nodes and lymphatic tissue. If any part of the lymphatic system is damaged, or missing, lymphatic fluid can start to collect in tissues and cause swelling. Lymphedema is a buildup of clear lymphatic fluid under your skin that causes swelling. As fluid continues to collect under your skin, the fat cells around it may start to grow. This can cause your limb (arm or leg) to change shape and get bigger. Compression therapy will not shrink your fat cells, but it can help to control the swelling of lymphedema. Surgical treatment may be needed to reduce the size of your arm or leg.

### Surgical Treatment Options for Lymphedema

Surgical treatment options are available to prevent or manage your lymphedema. These treatments can reduce swelling, help you feel better, or keep your symptoms from getting worse. Your doctor, nurse or certified lymphedema therapist will talk with you about the treatment that is best for you. If you have had lymphedema for a long time, a surgical treatment option may include **liposuction**. Liposuction for lymphedema may be an option for you if you do not have fluid changes, but still have a large limb (arm or leg).

### Liposuction for Lymphedema

Liposuction is a minimally invasive outpatient procedure that is used to remove fat from an area. During the procedure, small incisions are made into your skin and a small tube is inserted into your tissue. Your doctor uses suction to remove the fat from the area. After your procedure, compression therapy is used for 4 to 6 weeks to prevent fluid buildup and control swelling. Once the fat is removed from your tissue, it will not return. Lymphedema is a lifelong condition and it is important to continue compression therapy to manage your lymphedema and prevent fluid buildup.

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**This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.**

**Liposuction for lymphedema is not the same as cosmetic liposuction procedures.** It should only be done by a doctor who has been trained to surgically manage lymphedema.

For more information on lymphedema treatment options, ask for the patient education handout, [Lymphedema and Treatment Options](#) or view at <https://healthsystem.osumc.edu/pteduc/docs/LymphedemaTreatmentOptions.pdf>.

**For more information on Cancer-Related Lymphedema, we encourage you to visit our video library at <http://cancer.osu.edu/patientedvideos>.**