



Dear Doctors,

I had breast cancer surgery where they removed several lymph nodes and I fully recovered. 15 years later I have developed lymphedema in the arm that had the nodes removed. My arm is hot swollen and painful. I wear a compression bandage, but besides being uncomfortable I am also embarrassed and this is causing me to stop enjoying my life. Do you have any ideas to treat this?

BC in Jupiter and Connecticut

Dear BC,

Lymphedema is one of those really tough cases to treat but we have had success. The fact that you got it 15 year later suggests that your inner strength or Chi as they say in Traditional Chinese Medicine was strong enough to keep the lymphedema at bay all this time. As life marches on we lose a little of that inner strength each year, it's called aging.

There is some hope though. First you should keep up with the elastic bandage and also try some lymph drainage massage as taught by Dr. Vodder's school. This treatment is gentle and usually shows some improvement. I would also get Laser treatment on that arm. This is being pioneered as a solution for breast cancer related lymphedema in Australia where they have had a lot of dramatic success. You need a 500 milliwatt Gallium Arsenide laser in the 867 and 650 wavelengths. Be careful about using anything of less wattage than this for the reason that it simply does not work and would be a waste of your money. The laser is applied to the arm along the length of the arm for 25 minutes at a time. During this time you apply a dose of 5 joules/cm-squared to each point along the arm. Within a few treatments the arm starts to soften and become more comfortable.

There is also research that has shown that strong doses of antioxidants can help lymphedema as well. The antioxidants you want are the plant-derived bioflavonoids, proanthocyanidins, hesperidin and xanthone types. Herbal butcher's broom has been used in Europe for lymphedema. Finally, make sure you limit salt intake, raise the affected limb at times to facilitate drainage and keep moving!

Yours in Health,
Dr. Ervolino

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