

WELCOME TO OUR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY “QUICK SHEET.” We’re launching this new communications tool because many of you have asked for more information on some of the most commonly treated conditions here at Compass Rehabilitation’s occupational therapy department.

As always, we welcome your suggestions for future editions of “Quick Sheets.”

In addition to our traditional therapies, we also provide back-to-work programming such as functional capacity evaluations. Please feel free to contact me regarding any of our treatment programs. My goal is to be available to you as an extension of the care you give to your patients.

Sincerely,

Nicole Thelen, OT

Hours:

Monday - Thursday:

7am-6pm

Friday: **7am-5pm**

Address:

250 East Saginaw

East Lansing, MI 48823

(517) 337-3080

Education is Key to Treating Lymphedema

Lymphedema is a medical condition which results in swelling of a body part, or parts, when the lymphatic vessels and/or lymph nodes are damaged, inadequate, or nonfunctional. Lymphedema is a chronic condition which, left untreated, is progressive and can lead to infections, disfigurement, disability, and in some cases, death. There are many causes, but the most common is cancer. Breast cancer treatment places individuals at life-long risk for lymphedema.

Early diagnosis is key to maintaining or improving quality of life and independence, and it’s also a key to managing health care costs. Patient education, regarding the signs and symptoms of developing lymphedema, creates successful patient outcomes when detected early so that management of lymphedema can begin.



A pre-operative education, as well as baseline measurements of arms – or at least a post-operative measurements – should be a standard component of breast cancer care. With this approach, early measurements can be compared to subsequent measurement throughout recovery and survivorship. This data is also important when a patient migrates from oncology care to the care of their primary care physician. At the same time. these PCPs must understand the importance of lymphedema surveillance.

The Compass Rehabilitation Center has built pre- and post-surgical screening programs which consist of the following treatment approaches:

continued on back



- Patient education on the signs and symptoms of lymphedema, including a feeling of heaviness or tightness, limb pain or burning, swelling, redness and/or heat in the at-risk arm, chest, and trunk areas. When discovered, patients should report these symptoms immediately to their physician.
- Obtain objective measurement: A pre-operative or at least post-operative measurement of limb volume, size, and ROM in all joints should be taken and saved for future comparison if lymphedema should become an issue.
- All patients receive a lymphedema risk packet containing all important information on lymphedema management, and infection risk information.
- Height, weight, and BMI will be documented. Patients with a BMI greater than 30 will be referred to appropriate professional for nutritional counseling.

Lymphedema is managed by manual lymph drainage (MLD), and compression of affected areas. Education on skin care, exercise, instructions in self-care, self MLD, and bandaging are all part of a comprehensive approach to living with lymphedema.

Nicole Thelen, OT at the Compass Rehabilitation Center, breaks up therapy into two phases: An early intensive phase, followed by a self-care phase that can last for the rest of the patient's life.

The intensive phase consists of comprehensive decongestive therapy several times per week for approximately four to six weeks. This phase includes compression, MLD, and education on self-care (skin and nail care), self-bandaging, self MLD, exercise, and initiation to prepare for self-care. During the subsequent self-care phase, patients use compression garments/bandaging that are for day and night time use, continued exercise, skin and nail care, and MLD as needed. This care is usually performed by the patients themselves or caregivers. Follow-up visits every 6-12 months or occasionally more often, are highly recommended, depending on garment fit and/or changes in lymphedema in affected areas.