



**LYMPHEDEMA  
AFTER BREAST  
CANCER TREATMENT**

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**7 SIGNS & SYMPTOMS  
YOU DON'T WANT TO IGNORE**

*1st Edition*

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# **LYMPHEDEMA AFTER BREAST CANCER**

**If you are reading this book, it is very likely that you have been diagnosed with breast cancer and are either about to, are currently, or have just finished undergoing treatment for breast cancer.**

**Whatever stage you are in, I would like to acknowledge your strength, your fight, and your courage. I would also like to invite you to take full advantage of this very important information on the signs that could possibly mean lymphedema.**

**There is a very specific reason I am writing to you. I am writing to you to make you aware of a potential side effect of your life saving breast cancer treatment. I want to let you know about Lymphedema.**

# 1. A SENSATION OF PRESSURE, HEAVINESS, ACHINESS, FULLNESS, AND/OR TIGHTNESS.



A considerably large number of ladies with mild or latent lymphedema complained of having these vague symptoms as the very first sign that there was something to be concerned about.

These sensations can be felt in all of the areas on the radiated and/or surgical side. (Arm, hand, armpit, chest, breast, back, etc.)

Do not ignore any of these sensations because at this point lymphedema is possibly reversible.

These symptoms normally occur before there is noticeable swelling so they cannot be seen by a doctor but you must make it known that you are experiencing this discomfort. These are definitely early signs of lymphedema. It is not all in your head!!



## 2. SWELLING

Swelling is obviously the most common and looked for sign of lymphedema.

Unfortunately, sometimes, by the time you get to this point there has already been missed opportunities for diagnosis and early intervention.

The swelling most often occurs in the arm and hand but can definitely happen in the breast, chest, back and armpit of the radiated or surgical side. The swelling can sometimes come and go but please take this symptom seriously. Overtime, your lymphatic vessels can become dilated and no longer effectively direct lymph toward the heart, resulting in fluid build up.

### **3. PUFFINESS OR CHANGE IN SIZE ANYWHERE IN THE QUADRANT OF THE BODY THAT HAS UNDERGONE RADIATION OR SURGERY.**



This type of change is normally very gradual and can be noticed only a few ways.

The most obvious would be on your radiated or surgical side - blouse/shirt sleeve fitting tighter, your watch more snug, your rings tighter or harder to put on or take off.

Arm measurements should definitely be taken at this point to see if there is more than a 2 cm difference in the unaffected side vs the affected (radiated/surgical) side.



#### **4. VISIBLE SKIN CHANGES. (INABILITY TO PINCH SKIN, TAUT/HARD SKIN, PITTING, PEAU D'ORANGE)**

Sometimes, these visible skin changes are associated with lymphedema that has progressed past the latency stage or no longer considered a "precursor" to lymphedema.

The inability to pinch skin is evidence of taut or really tight skin that could possibly be full with lymph fluid. Try pinching a fold of skin in between the forefinger and the thumb.

Pitting is when the tissue swells due to an excess of fluid and if pressed, the skin indents and remains indented. You might also notice indentations from shirt cuffs, watch bands, or after you rest your arm on an irregular surface and the indentation remains.



Peau d'orange is a fancy word for "orange skin" in French. It is when the skin appears to resemble the skin of an orange. The swelling and hair follicles look like lots of little dimples.

Sometimes the affected area just remains hard. For example, your breast might remain hard after undergoing breast cancer treatment such as radiation in that area.

## 5. PAIN OR TINGLING



You might have read that lymphedema is not typically painful. Well, lymphedema in and of itself shouldn't cause pain but the discomfort and heaviness from fluid build up can sometimes become debilitating and contribute to making other problems worse.

It might become painful if you have an infection or if muscle and tendon issues have started due to the weight of the limb.

If you experience tingling, this is normally due to nerve pain or chemotherapy side effects and not lymphedema. There are nerves under the arm that can be damaged during lymph node removal. This can cause numbness, tingling, and nerve pain below the armpit and along the inner arm all the way to your elbow.





## **6. DECREASED FLEXIBILITY {ARM FATIGUE, DECREASED RANGE OF MOTION}**

Scar tissue caused by surgery can cause lymphatic blockage and also decrease the range of motion in your arm. The heaviness and achiness in the arm from fibrosis can also contribute to the arm fatigue, weakness, and decreased flexibility.

A photograph of a person's arm and hand. The person is wearing a white sleeveless top. Their right hand is holding their left elbow. There is a prominent red, inflamed area on the elbow, which is highlighted with a red glow. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

## **7. INFECTION (INFLAMMATION, REDNESS, HEAT)**

If Lymphedema is left untreated it will progress and this is normally when the skin can leak and cause blisters.

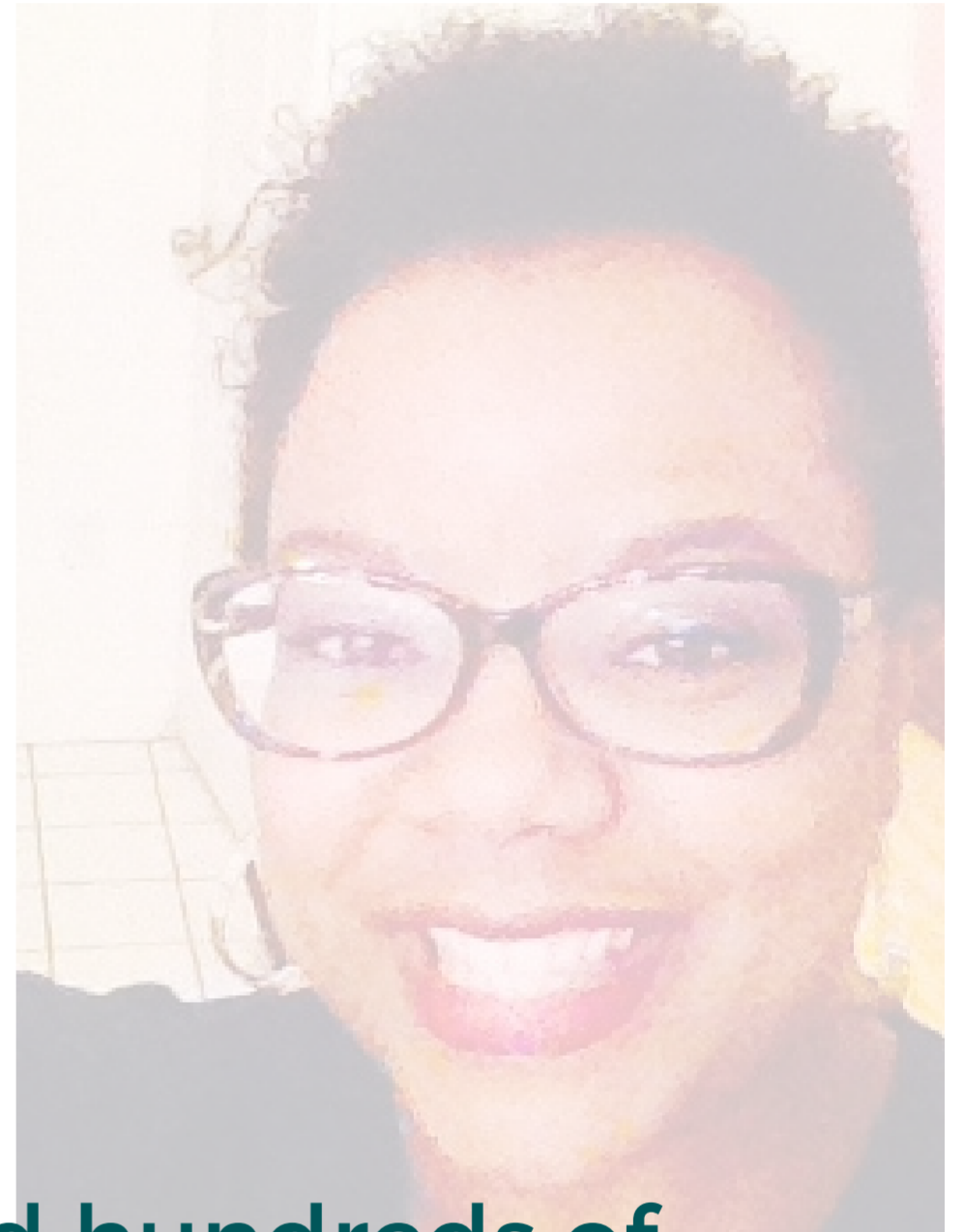
This is also when you have an even greater risk of getting infections.

In addition, lymph nodes (which help fight infections) are compromised or missing in most patients with lymphedema. As a result, infections can progress rapidly and can be severe by the time they are detected.

# BE EMPOWERED

IF YOU DO HAVE ANY OF THESE SIGNS OR SYMPTOMS, THERE IS HOPE...

My name is **Erica Ward** and I am the former clinical manager for a Lymphedema women's center, Certified Lymphedema Therapist, Board Certified Massage Therapist, and **The Lymphedema Coach**.



Over the years, I have supported hundreds of women with beginning Lymphedema treatment. I have repeatedly found that many of these courageous ladies had no idea about potentially having to live with Lymphedema as a result of the very necessary breast cancer treatment. Those that are informed, sometimes, have lots of misinformation and the condition is improperly managed.

Please join our **facebook community** for information on awareness, prevention, **resources, and management of Lymphedema.**