



# Remedial exercises for upper extremity lymphedema:

## Information for patients

By Marize Ibrahim and Angela Yung

Muscle contractions help with lymphatic drainage, which is why exercise is highly encouraged for patients with lymphedema. Try to incorporate exercise as part of your routine and daily practice to optimize your health and maximize benefits on your lymphatic system. When starting any exercise, start slowly, and progress gently as your body adapts to the regimen. Compression bandages or

sleeves should be worn during the exercises, if you already own them. Ensure you maintain good posture throughout each exercise! This is a modified exercise program that can be done easily during the day; however please speak with your lymphedema therapist to have the program customized appropriately for you and your needs. Remember, the exercises should not be painful.

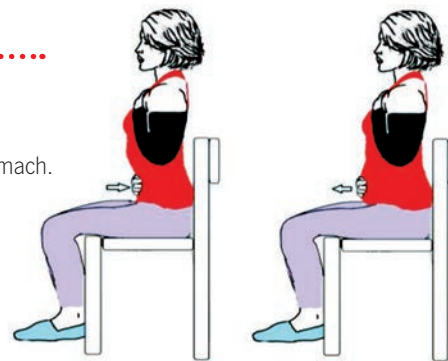
### Editor's Note:

The following are examples of exercises that could be integrated into educational information given to patients as part of a self-management programme.

The following remedial exercises, adapted from Casley-Smith principles<sup>1</sup> can be performed in a seated position. Aim to do 3-5 repetitions of each exercise, which should take approximately 15 minutes. [LP](#)

### 1 Abdominal breathing exercises

- Relax your neck and shoulders; place one hand on your upper chest and the other on your stomach.
- Take a deep breath through your nose and feel the hand on your stomach move out (the other hand on your chest should not be moving).
- Breathe out slowly and as long as you can until you exhale completely (the hand on your stomach should move inwards).



### 2 Neck range of motion exercises with deep breaths

- Turn your head slowly to the right and as far as you can while you inhale, then return to center as you exhale. Repeat to the left.
- Tilt your right ear towards your right shoulder as far as you can while you inhale and then return to center. Repeat to the left.



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### 3 Knee tucks with deep breathing

- Do the abdominal breathing (exercise 1) and while you exhale, lift your right knee to your chest and relax.
- Alternate by bringing up the left knee to your chest slowly.



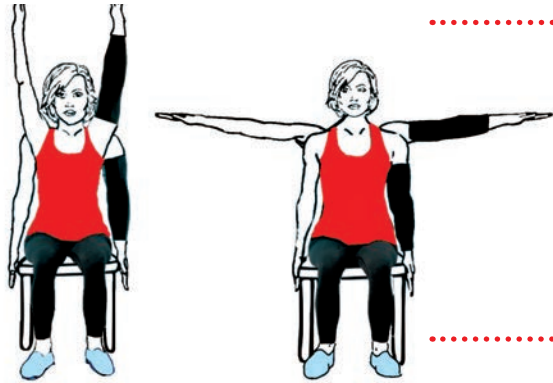
### 4 Shoulder shrugs

- Lift both shoulders up towards your ears as you inhale. Exhale and pull your shoulders down as far as possible. End by relaxing the shoulders.

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### 5 Shoulder blade squeezes

- Keep your shoulders relaxed and down. Squeeze your shoulder blades together, hold 5 seconds and relax your shoulder blades and arms down.



### 6 Shoulder elevation/abduction

- Lift both your arms forward as high as you can above your head with deep breathing. Exhale slowly as you bring your arms down.
- Lift both your arms to the side as high as you can above your head with deep breathing. Exhale slowly as you bring your arms down.



### 7 Elbow flexion

- Bend your right elbow towards your shoulder as much as possible as you inhale. Exhale slowly as you straighten your elbow completely.
- Repeat on left side.

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### 8 Grip/wrist circles

- Make a fist with both hands, hold 5 seconds and then straighten out all your fingers. Take slow deep breaths during movement.
- With both hands in a fist, make small circles in one direction and then the other. Take slow deep breaths during movement.



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### 9 Abdominal breathing

- End your session with abdominal breathing outlined in step 1.



**Marize Ibrahim, MSc, PT, CSLT** and **Angela Yung, BSc, PT, ALT** are both certified lymphedema therapists working at the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) Lymphedema Program in Montreal, Quebec. A special thank you to Stephen Chan for the illustrations.

Reference: 1) Casley-Smith, JR, Boris M, Weindorf S, Lasinski B (1998) Treatment for lymphedema of the arm - the Casley-Smith method: A noninvasive method produces continued reduction. Cancer: 83(S12B), 2843-2860