

DIET & LYMPHEDEMA

Many people ask if there is a special diet for lymphedema. The short answer is no, there is no special diet. However, there are a few guidelines that can be helpful. Essentially individuals with lymphedema are advised to adopt general, healthy dietary habits, which are beneficial to us all. However, they are of more consequence for a person living with lymphedema.

DIETARY GUIDELINES

Drink Plenty of Fluids: This may seem counter-intuitive, but lymphedema is less of a problem of fluid retention than it is an issue of waste removal from the tissue spaces. Allowing the body to flush clean water through the edematous area is helpful, like a fresh rain is healthy for the soil. Most persons report that drinking plenty of fluids helps them to feel better.

Eat Normal Amounts of Protein: This again may seem counter-intuitive since lymphedema is defined as a high-protein edema. You may have heard that less protein may decrease lymphedema. The physiology is not that simple though and the rest of your body still needs the protein for cells to function. The excess protein of the high-protein edema is addressed by the manual lymphatic drainage (MLD) portion of therapy.

Avoid Fats and Sweets and Unnecessary Weight Gain: This is perhaps the most important dietary recommendation. Research is clear that high-fat intake, high calorie diets and weight gain are correlated with increased lymphedema. The good news is that losing excess weight and reducing fats and sweets in the diet can help to reduce lymphedema. Of course, if you do not have excess weight to lose, losing further weight will not reduce your lymphedema. Therefore, we advise strongly against unnecessary weight loss when your weight is within a healthy range.

Avoid Salts: As you probably already know, an increase in dietary salt will increase water retention. Many persons with lymphedema will notice a perceptible increase in lymphedema symptoms after they eat a high-sodium meal. Minimizing salt intake will help to keep your lymphedema at a lower level.