Occupational Therapy – Upper Extremity Care

What is Lymphedema?
It is a condition that can cause major swelling of the arm and hand due to excess lymph fluid accumulation in the tissues. This can occur when the lymphatic system, which is responsible for draining excess fluids, is damaged or altered by surgery and/or radiation therapy.

How can I prevent Lymphedema?
- Avoid lifting or carrying items using the affected arm (e.g. carrying heavy handbags with over the shoulder straps).
- Avoid vigorous movements against resistance with the affected arm (e.g., scrubbing the floor, pushing furniture, pulling heavy objects).
- Avoid temperatures above 90 degrees such as hot tubs, saunas, or sunbathing. At ALL times, keep your limb protected from the sun.
- Maintain good hygiene by keeping skin clean and dry with hypoallergenic soap. To prevent skin from drying, use moisturizer frequently.
- Don’t wear anything binding such as tight jewelry or elastic cuffs around the affected limb.
- Push back your cuticles instead of cutting them when manicuring your hands to prevent infection.
- Restore full range of motion to your shoulder complex.
- If you notice difficulty with hanging up clothes in the closet, reaching for items in the refrigerator, etc., you may need specific exercises to help increase your range.
- It is important to prevent injuries to hands and fingers, as they may become infected.
- Report any injury to the affected arm to your physician as soon as possible.
- A Tetanus vaccine is recommended every ten years to prevent against tetanus.

For additional information, visit our cancer center website at: www.valleyhealthcancercenter.com or call Outpatient Rehabilitation at 201-447-8131 to speak with an Occupational Therapist.

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