

For more information about lymphedema treatment, call 908-685-2944, fax 908-685-2531 or visit our Web site at [somersetmedicalcenter.com/rehab](http://somersetmedicalcenter.com/rehab).

Treatment by an occupational or physical therapist requires a referral from a physician. If you need a physician, call our free physician referral service at 800-443-4605 or visit [somersetmedicalcenter.com/doctor](http://somersetmedicalcenter.com/doctor).

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# *Lymphedema*

TREATMENT PROGRAM

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## **SOMERSET MEDICAL CENTER**

is a nationally accredited, regional medical center providing comprehensive emergency, medical/surgical and rehabilitative services and a broad range of community programs to Central New Jersey residents.

The medical center is a major clinical affiliate of UMDNJ – Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and a clinical research affiliate of The Cancer Institute of New Jersey.



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## What is Lymphedema?

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**L**YMPHEDEMA IS A CHRONIC SWELLING caused by the accumulation of lymph fluid in the body, usually in an arm or leg. When working properly, the lymphatic system transports the body's metabolic waste materials to the lymph nodes for filtration and white blood cells to fight infection. Lymphedema occurs when the body's lymphatic system malfunctions. It may develop after surgery or radiation therapy, but also can appear after trauma to the body or without apparent cause.

If lymphedema is not treated in a timely manner, it may cause disfigurement, discomfort or disability of the arm or leg. It also can lead to bacterial and fungal infections.

## How is Lymphedema Treated?

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Manual lymphatic drainage (MLD) is currently the most effective treatment for lymphedema. Provided by certified occupational and physical therapists at Somerset Medical Center, MLD is the combination of compression bandaging of the afflicted arm or leg and gentle manual drainage.

The treatment program depends on a patient's personal needs. A certified therapist will assess the ability to use the afflicted arm or leg, begin treatment and help the patient gain confidence to become independent.

Patients may receive therapy for up to three months so that they learn to manage their condition on their own. Our therapists provide

patient education about lymphedema treatment, as well as demonstrations to the family to ensure appropriate ongoing therapy at home. Following treatment, patients may be fitted with a compression garment to help prevent recurrence.

## Prevention of Lymphedema

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To reduce the risk of infection and prevent lymphedema, the following precautions should be taken:

- Avoid hangnails, scratches, burns or cuts. Any burn or break in the skin could result in an infection and swelling.
- When manicuring fingernails, use cuticle cream instead of scissors.
- Use gardening gloves when working outdoors.
- Wear clothing and jewelry that does not bind your skin.
- Avoid harsh chemicals when cleaning.
- Carry only light packages and handbags.
- If you have had a mastectomy, lumpectomy or removal of lymph nodes, avoid injections, vaccinations and blood pressure readings in the afflicted arm.
- If you are a surgical or radiation treatment patient, examine the area of treatment and tell your doctor about any noticeable skin changes.
- Avoid extreme warmth on the affected limb, including hot packs, sunbathing, saunas and whirlpools.