

## What is risk reduction for head and neck lymphedema?

**Risk reduction** is a set of actions you can take to improve or prevent worsening of lymphedema in the head and neck region.

The following could worsen lymphedema:

- Trauma to the head and neck
- Infection
- Using a sauna
- Obesity

## Follow these tips for risk reduction:

Skin hygiene is crucial to maintain healthy skin in order to avoid infection or skin breakdown.

- Moisturize daily if your skin is in good condition; twice daily if your skin is dry or flaky.
- Apply sunscreen and insect repellent for outdoor activities to protect your skin.
- Clean cuts or scrapes in the affected area immediately to prevent infection.
- Men may want to consider switching to an electric razor to decrease risk of cuts and scrapes while shaving their face.
- Sleep with the head or neck in a slightly elevated position (on pillows or wedge) to increase lymphatic drainage at nighttime and prevent pooling of fluid.
- Continue your home management program as designed by you and therapist including use of your compression garments.

- If you have any questions, please refer back to your lymphedema therapist or your healthcare provider.

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by Michigan Medicine for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by Michigan Medicine and for which Michigan Medicine does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Author: Amber Richardson OTR/L, CLT  
Reviewers: Jodie Briggs OT, Monica Hubbert OT, Monique Alofs OT

Patient Education by [Michigan Medicine](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License](#). Last Revised 12/2020