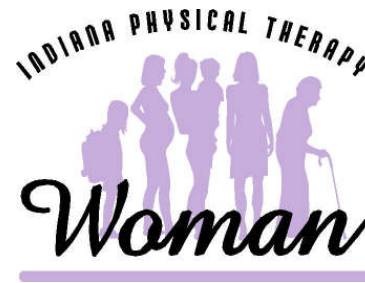


# Lymphedema



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## What is Lymphedema?

The lymphatic system removes waste such as protein, cell debris, infection, and foreign bodies from cells. Damage to this system can cause a build up in these wastes resulting in swelling in the affected tissues.

Lymphedema is the swelling of an arm, leg, or other region of the body due to an abnormal accumulation of protein rich fluid called *lymph* in body tissue.

Lymphedema develops when part of the lymphatic system has been removed, damaged or never develops properly. As the swelling increases, the tissues thicken or harden which causes further damage to the lymphatic system and affected tissues.

If left untreated, lymphedema may result in recurrent infections, range of motion limitations, decreased function of involved limb, and other health related problems.

## Types of Lymphedema

Primary lymphedema results from congenital abnormalities that appear immediately at birth or during puberty (*lymphedema praecox*) and is most commonly seen in girls. This form can also develop in adults and is known as *lymphedema tarda*. Some forms of primary lymphedema are hereditary and can affect multiple limbs.

Secondary lymphedema results when there is an identifiable cause such as surgery, infection, trauma, or lymph/venous insufficiency. It is most commonly caused by cancer related treatments such as surgical dissection and radiation therapy.



## Signs & Symptoms

It is important that you seek immediate medical attention if you notice any persistent swelling. Important signs and symptoms to watch out for include:

- History of lymph node removal or dissection
- Sensation of fullness or heaviness in limbs
- Tautness or a tight feeling in skin
- Decreased flexibility in hand, wrist, or ankle
- Tight fitting clothing in one specific area

## Treatment

No known cure exists for lymphedema. However, Comprehensive Decongestive Therapy (CDT) is the most beneficial form of treatment to date. Treatment is designed to reduce the amount of swelling in the affected limb and return the patient to typical work and life activities. CDT includes manual lymph drainage, medical compression bandaging, exercises, skin care/infection prevention, and self-care instructions.

## Referral Process

Indiana law requires a physician referral for all physical therapy. The law also empowers patients to choose their physical therapy provider. Ask your physician to refer you to Indiana Physical Therapy Woman for lymphedema treatment. Your therapist will work with your physician to help establish a specific treatment protocol.



## Terra Williams, MPT, COMT, MLD/CDT Lymphedema Specialist

Terra graduated from Southwest Baptist University in 2000 with her master's degree in physical therapy. She has training and experience with a diverse outpatient population with a variety of diagnoses. She received her lymphedema training and certification in manual lymph drainage comprehensive decongestive therapy (MLD/CDT) through the Norton School of Lymphatic Therapy in 2004 and is eligible for national lymphedema certification through the Lymphology Association of North America (LANA).

## Lymphedema Program at Indiana Physical Therapy Woman

Indiana Physical Therapy Woman specializes in the treatment of women's unique diagnoses and conditions. In addition to our therapeutic exercises, Indiana Physical Therapy Woman also specializes in the training during and post partum pregnancy, pelvic pain, urinary incontinence, fecal incontinence, osteoporosis, and lymphedema.

Director of the clinic, Margaret Bryden, PT, WCS, COMT, CSCS, is certified in pelvic physical therapy through the APTA and is a Board Certified Woman's Clinical Specialist. This is the highest expertise a therapist can achieve in women's health.

For questions about Indiana Physical Therapy Woman or women's physical therapy, please contact Margaret Bryden at (260) 969-8992.



*Indiana Physical Therapy Woman is a specialty division of Indiana Physical Therapy*