

Travel tips for reducing your risk of lymphoedema

Some people have reported swelling of the arm or leg (lymphoedema) after air travel and long car, bus or train trips. There is no conclusive evidence that the trip itself causes lymphoedema, but there are a number of theories about why travel may cause lymphoedema.

Here are some of the reasons:

- Lymphoedema may be triggered by the combination of low cabin pressure and physical inactivity when flying.
- Any long trip can involve long periods of physical inactivity, which may reduce lymphatic flow and cause your arm or leg to swell.

Lymphoedema may be triggered by extra activities as you prepare to travel or by changes in normal routine, such as:

Concentrated cleaning of the house before the trip (like vacuuming or ironing) can place extra strain on the lymphatic system of a limb

- Carrying heavy luggage
- Juggling luggage with a heavy shoulder bag
- Stopping normal exercise routines while on holidays

Ways to reduce your risk of lymphoedema

1. Spread the cleaning of the house over several days – or better still, get someone else to do it.
2. Consider using luggage on wheels.
3. Try to carry your shoulder bag on the opposite shoulder to the side where you had surgery.
4. Exercise your arms and legs during the trip. Consider taking a soft squeeze ball and use it regularly.
5. Walk about every couple of hours. It's good for the back as well as your general lymphatic flow.
6. Air travellers should wear loose-fitting, non-restrictive clothes.
7. Stay well hydrated and avoid alcohol and drinks with caffeine.
8. If you are travelling by air, try to get a seat that allows you to move about.
9. If you are travelling by car, bus or train, exercise your arm or leg as much as possible.
10. If you are driving, shift your arm around and keep the lymphatic flow moving by gently squeezing the steering wheel.

