



[Subscribe Today!](#)

Tanning Beds and Saunas with Lymphedema: Risks and Considerations

Introduction

Lymphedema is a chronic condition characterized by the accumulation of lymphatic fluid, leading to swelling, most commonly in the arms or legs. This condition requires careful management to prevent complications and maintain quality of life. Among the various lifestyle considerations for individuals with lymphedema, using tanning beds and saunas often raises questions. This article explores the potential risks and considerations for those with lymphedema contemplating using these facilities.

Understanding Lymphedema

Lymphedema occurs when the lymphatic system, which helps regulate fluid balance and immune function, is impaired. This can be due to congenital factors (primary lymphedema) or acquired conditions such as surgery, radiation therapy, infection, or trauma (secondary lymphedema). Symptoms include swelling, pain, reduced mobility, and an increased risk of infections. Effective management typically involves a combination of compression therapy, exercise, skincare, and manual lymphatic drainage.

Tanning Beds: Potential Risks

Tanning beds emit ultraviolet (UV) radiation, which can pose several risks for individuals with lymphedema:

Heat and Swelling: The heat generated by tanning beds can exacerbate swelling in the affected limbs. Increased temperature can lead to vasodilation (widening blood vessels), potentially worsening fluid accumulation and swelling.

Skin Damage: UV radiation can damage the skin, making it more susceptible to infections. Individuals with lymphedema are already at a higher risk for infections such as cellulitis; additional skin damage can further increase this risk.

Dehydration: Prolonged exposure to UV radiation can cause dehydration, adversely affecting the body's ability to manage fluid balance, complicating lymphedema management.

Saunas: Considerations and Precautions

Saunas, which use dry or wet heat, also present potential challenges for those with lymphedema:

Heat Exposure: Similar to tanning beds, the high temperatures in saunas can lead to vasodilation and increased swelling. The heat can also exacerbate the sensation of heaviness and discomfort in the affected limbs.

Fluid Balance: Sweating induced by saunas can lead to fluid loss and dehydration. Maintaining proper hydration is crucial for individuals with lymphedema to support lymphatic function and fluid balance.

Infection Risk: Saunas can be breeding grounds for bacteria and fungi, particularly in communal settings. The warm, moist environment can increase the risk of skin infections, particularly concerning individuals with lymphedema.

Recommendations for Individuals with Lymphedema

Given the potential risks, individuals with lymphedema should exercise caution when considering tanning beds and saunas. Here are some recommendations:

Consult with Healthcare Providers: Before using tanning beds or saunas, individuals with lymphedema should consult their healthcare providers. Medical professionals can provide personalized advice based on the severity of the condition and individual health status.

Limit Exposure: If a healthcare provider approves limited use, keeping exposure to heat and UV radiation brief is crucial. Short sessions help minimize the risk of exacerbating symptoms.

Stay Hydrated: Maintaining proper hydration is essential. Drinking plenty of water before and after using a sauna can help offset fluid loss and support lymphatic function.

Monitor Skin Health: Regularly check the skin for signs of damage or infection. If any unusual symptoms such as redness, increased swelling, or pain occur, seek medical attention promptly.

Consider Alternatives: For those seeking relaxation or therapeutic benefits, consider alternative methods that do not involve heat or UV exposure, such as gentle massage, meditation, or low-impact exercise.

Conclusion

While tanning beds and saunas offer certain aesthetic and relaxation benefits, they can pose significant risks for individuals with lymphedema. Heat exposure, dehydration, and increased infection risk are all factors that can complicate the management of this chronic condition. By consulting healthcare providers and taking appropriate precautions, individuals with lymphedema can make informed decisions to protect their health and well-being.



Interested in taking an ACOLS Course?

The Academy of Lymphatic Studies offers certification courses in lymphedema management and manual lymphatic drainage. CEU's are available for nurses in select states!

For more information, course listings, and to register for an upcoming course, [Click Here!](#)