

## Nutritional Aspects in Lymphedema

Patients affected by lymphedema should try their best to achieve and maintain a reasonable weight in order to reduce the risk factors associated with obesity (see blog entry December 3, 2010).

### What is the Lymphedema Diet?

The truth is that there is no special diet for lymphedema. Patients affected by lymphedema, just like everybody else, should trust their own judgment when it comes to the selection of a proper diet. If there are no other medical conditions present, such as diabetes or heart disease, a healthy and balanced diet should be the goal.

An accepted approach in lymphedema management is to follow a low-salt and low-fat diet, which also positively contributes to weight management. A balanced healthy diet including whole grains, fish, fruits and vegetables and avoiding fatty foods, or those with high cholesterol will greatly reduce risk factors associated with lymphedema.



Many patients are under the impression that lymphedema may be positively affected by limiting the protein intake. This is not the case - although lymphedema is defined as an accumulation of water and protein in the tissues, it is essential to understand that lymphedema cannot be reduced by the limitation of protein ingestion. It is also important not to limit fluid intake in an attempt to reduce the swelling. Good hydration (water) is essential for basic cell function and especially important before and after lymphedema treatment to assist the body in eliminating waste products.

### The Role of Cholesterol in the Management of Lymphedema

Cholesterol is a fatty substance which is produced by the liver and found in food with a high content of saturated fat, such as meat, eggs and dairy products. Cholesterol has gotten somewhat of a bad name. However, the amount of fat eaten is not really linked with disease; it is the kind of fat which is consumed. Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) consists of saturated and trans fats. LDL, also known as “bad” cholesterol may stick to the inside wall of arteries and increase the risk of coronary diseases. The “good” fats, monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, or high-density lipoprotein (HDL) lower the risk of disease. Eating too many saturated fats can raise the level of “bad” cholesterol and contribute to [obesity](#).

### **What about Vitamins and other Supplements?**

There are no vitamins, food supplements or herbs that have been proven to be effective in the reduction of lymphedema. In the United States, dietary supplements are regulated as food, not drugs. Pre-market approval by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are not required unless specific disease prevention or treatment claims are made. Because there is no requirement to review dietary supplements for manufacturing consistency, and no specific standards for dosage or purity exist, there may be considerable variation within the products marketed as dietary supplements.

However, lymphedema patients are often in need of additional vitamins and supplements, especially if they battle recurrent episodes of infections. To determine which supplements and vitamins are beneficial, individuals with lymphedema should consult with their physicians and/or nutritional specialist.

Additional Resources:

Video - Diet and Lymphedema: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3XcId2Gaio&NR=1>  
[Lymphedema People](#)  
[The National Cancer Institute](#)  
[American Cancer Society](#)  
[Medical News Today](#)