



BREAST HEALTH & REHABILITATION CENTER

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Lymphedema and Air Travel

Many patients who have surgical procedures as a result of breast cancer involving removal of lymph nodes are told to observe lymphedema precautions to prevent the occurrence of lymphedema. One precaution is to wear a compression garment during air travel due to changing cabin pressure.

Recent studies* suggest that there is no significant difference in lymphedema rates for fliers and non-fliers. In one study* some women developed lymphedema in spite of using prevention compression techniques. In another study** lymphedema was reportedly caused by air travel in 9% of the respondents with post-mastectomy lymphedema and worsened by air travel in 14% of the post-mastectomy respondents. If a patient has pre-existing lymphedema, compression may be beneficial. However, domestic air travel is low risk and compression devices are possibly counterproductive.

In addition, compression bandaging is preferable to compression garments as it has the ability to give slightly with changes in cabin pressure whereas garments are more static in nature. In general, custom garments can be expensive and need to be refit as the patient's arm changes in size with treatment.

The therapists at the Breast Health and Rehabilitation Center are knowledgeable about compression bandaging for lymphedema and can teach your patient a bandaging protocol based on their individual needs. We provide our patients with instructional handouts and their own set of bandages for home.

*Casely-Smith JR. Lymphedema initiated by aircraft flights. *Aviation, Space, and Environmental Medicine* 1995 67:1.

**Graham PH. Compression prophylaxis may increase the potential for flight-associated lymphedema after breast cancer treatment. *The Breast* 2002 11; 66-71

Lymphedema Precautions

There is no current evidence to support the prevention of lymphedema, however some tips from the therapists at the Breast Health and Rehab Center you can give your patients are:

- Protect the skin as best you can, i.e. wear gloves with gardening/sewing.
- Watch for signs of infection.
- Maintain motion in the shoulder complex, movement helps lymph flow.
- Never allow blood pressures or needle sticks on the limb at risk.

For more information on conditions we treat and our rehab team visit our website:

www.breastrehab.com