



# Alberta Lymphedema Association

Lymphedema (lim-fa-DEE-ma)

Chronic swelling (edema) caused by a buildup of fluid (lymph) that can develop in any part of the body.



Diane Martin  
lymphnet@telus.net



[www.albertalymphedema.com](http://www.albertalymphedema.com)

## Types

Primary lymphedema - genetic predisposition.  
Secondary lymphedema - caused by a serious injury, infection, surgery, or radiation that damages lymphatic function/the lymphatic system.

## Causes

The lymphatic system is faulty or damaged and cannot function as normal.  
For example from a burn or skin infection (cellulitis), surgery or radiation.

## Impact on the Patient

Some patients have gone years without being diagnosed or getting any kind of treatment. Lymphedema often impacts patients' emotional well-being due to changes in self-image, lack of support, and the need for constant disease management. You also must be vigilant with keeping your skin clean and moisturized so that you do not get cellulitis, an infection commonly associated with LE.

Important facts about LE prevalence and care

- Potential Prevalence in Canada as of 2017 is up to 1 million.
- Anyone can be affected by lymphedema.
- Alberta is the only province that pays for clinical LE care.

## Treatment and Care of Lymphedema

The best treatment is decongestive lymphatic therapy from a certified lymphedema therapist. It includes:

- Compression therapy to reduce and minimize swelling
- Lymphatic drainage (a special type of gentle massage) to improve lymph flow, direct fluid to other drainage pathways, and unblock or soften hard tissue
- Skin care education to avoid infection
- Exercises to promote lymphatic function and flow