

How will I benefit from Lymphatic screening?

Lymphoedema is a condition that can cause significant swelling of the arm or leg (at risk limb – depends upon where the surgery is) due to excess lymphatic fluid building up. When lymphoedema is not diagnosed early and managed properly, it may become a long-term, irreversible condition, affecting quality of life, appearance and increases risk of recurrent infection. Some of the factors that may increase the risk of developing lymphoedema include removal of lymph nodes, radiation therapy, limitation in movement of nearby joints and scar tissue. It is best to detect any lymphoedema very early in its development. Earlier treatment of lymphoedema often means better outcomes and less long term consequences.

What are the Symptoms?

Some of the early signs and symptoms of lymphoedema include:

- A feeling of aching, heaviness or tightness in your arm / leg
- Rings, bracelets, clothing or a watch band beginning to feel tighter than normal
- Pitting - when pressed with a finger, an indentation in your limb that takes a while to go away

How is Lymphoedema Measured Today?

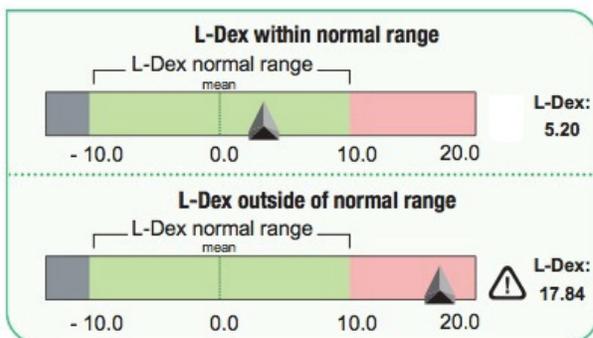
Unfortunately, most lymphoedema is not detected until the at-risk limb has become visibly swollen. By this time, in some cases, the condition is irreversible and may require long term management. Once diagnosed, lymphoedema is monitored during therapy by either a tape measure or other devices which estimate the total volume of the limb. However, the good news is that there is now a device called low frequency impedance which helps a therapist to clinically assess and treat the onset of lymphoedema earlier and to clinically monitor therapy more closely.

The test is simple and painless. Low frequency impedance can detect increased fluid levels before visible swelling. The increase is measured by passing a very low, harmless, electrical signal through the body. There is no danger or pain from this process – the electrical signal is about the same strength as that of a watch battery.



What Does an L-Dex Value Mean?

An L-Dex device compares how easily the electrical signal travels in the unaffected versus the affected (or at-risk) limbs and generates an L-Dex value from this comparison. The L-Dex value indicates the difference in the amount of fluid in the unaffected limb versus the affected limb. L-Dex values are displayed against a normal “healthy” range (see diagram below). L-Dex values greater than 10 or an increase of 5 L-Dex units may be indicative of lymphoedema. L-Dex values indicative of lymphoedema should decrease as a result of therapy.



The L-Dex scale is a tool to assist in the clinical assessment of lymphoedema by your therapist. The L-Dex scale alone is not intended to diagnose or predict lymphoedema of an extremity.

How Does L-Dex Help You?

The L-Dex system is best used as a series of measurements over time. This allows your therapist to:

- Assess early stages of lymphoedema in at-risk patients and therefore start therapy as soon as possible.
- Accurately monitor the effectiveness of therapy for those who already have lymphoedema.

Who can benefit from an L-Dex measurement?

- Anyone experiencing swelling in one affected limb (arm or leg)
e.g. Melanoma removal, after surgery of complex fractures, primary lymphoedema
- Anyone with an 'at risk' limb prior to or after cancer treatment

Preparation for your L-Dex measurement

When you are scheduled to attend ensure that you:

- Are normally hydrated – eat and drink normally
- Have not exercised 2 hours prior to the reading
- Have not consumed caffeine 2 hours prior to the reading
- Have not consumed alcohol 12 hours prior to the reading
- Have emptied your bladder recently
- Notify the therapist if there is a possibility of pregnancy, if you have a pacemaker or other implanted electronic device or any metal implants such as pins or plates in bones.

Cairns Occupational Therapy commenced the **Lymphatic Screening Service** in July 2013 utilising the expertise of Kerry Stingel and Rebecca Morrision (Sperring). Our Occupational Therapists work extensively in this area of practice and will help ensure we can meet your timeframes, pre and post op.

It is recommended that all people undertaking treatment for cancer have a pre-surgery L-Dex reading and circumferential measurements taken. Then have a review completed every 3 to 6 months post op for two years, every 6 to 12 months thereafter. Assessment should be brought forward if symptoms such as heaviness, tightness, swelling and/or aching in the at-risk limb occurs.

Call Cairns Occupational Therapy on 40515504 to book for the Lymphatic Screening Service. The cost is \$170 for the initial consult (1 hour) and \$85 for subsequent 30 minute consults (as at January 2016). You may be able to claim a rebate for these services from your private health fund or via TCA/EPC referral from your GP. Cairns Occupational Therapy is located in Suite 28, First floor Virginia House, 68 Abbott Street, Cairns (opposite the City Library).

We are thankful for the assistance of COUCH Cairns in the provision of the L-Dex machine to assist with providing more detailed assessment. As of September 2015 there is a cost of \$26 associated with each L-Dex reading in order to cover the cost of the specialised electrodes.



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