

For more information regarding  
Lymphedema Management services  
at CVMC or to make a referral, please  
contact our

Outpatient Rehabilitation Center:  
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# Lymphedema Management

## Complete Decongestive Therapy



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Catawba Valley Medical Center is a not-for profit health care system that exists to provide high quality health care and promote the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being of the public served, to serve as a center for health education, wellness services, preventative medicine, and acute care throughout Catawba County and surrounding areas. To access services or learn more about CVMC, call or visit the Health First Center at Valley Hills Mall, Highway 70, Hickory, N.C. (828-485-2300) or visit our website at [www.catawbavalleymc.org](http://www.catawbavalleymc.org).



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# What is Lymphedema?

Lymphedema is a very common and serious condition, affecting at least 3 million Americans. It occurs when the lymphatic system becomes insufficient and is unable to perform its normal functions. The result is an abnormal accumulation of water and proteins, primarily under the first layer of skin tissue.



and to maintain the reduction by removing excess plasma proteins and water from the tissues, utilizing remaining lymph vessels and other lymphatic pathways. Additional goals are prevention and elimination of infections and the reduction and removal of fibrotic (hardened) tissues.

While Lymphedema is most commonly present in the extremities, it may also affect the trunk, abdomen, head and neck, the external genitalia as well as the inner organs. Its onset is gradual in some patients and sudden in others. Most patients develop lymphedema after surgery and/or radiation therapy for various cancers (breast, uterus, prostate, bladder, lymphoma, melanoma), in which case it is referred to as secondary lymphedema. Other patients develop it without obvious cause at different stages in life (primary lymphedema), and still others develop it after trauma or deep vein thrombosis.

Lymphedema is serious due to its long-term physical and psychosocial consequences for patients as it continues to progress if left untreated.

## How is Lymphedema Treated?

Complete Decongestive Therapy (CDT) is the therapy of choice for most patients suffering from primary and secondary lymphedema. CDT is a non-invasive, multi-component approach to treat lymphedema. The goal in lymphedema management is to reduce the swelling

CDT has four components designed to achieve this goal:

- Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD)
- Compression Therapy
- Decongestive Exercises
- Skin Care

Treatment is applied in two phases:

*Intensive Phase:* The patient is treated by a skilled and specially trained therapist five days a week until the swollen extremity is reduced to a normal or near normal size.

*Self-Management Phase:* The patient assumes responsibility for managing, improving and maintaining the results achieved in the intensive phase.

While Lymphedema is considered to be a chronic condition, the CVMC lymphedema management program is designed to provide individualized treatment, education, support and follow-up to enhance the long-term success of each patient we serve.