

Stages of Lymphedema—

Stage 0 (subclinical) – No one looking at your body would see any swelling. However, you will feel a heaviness in that area of the body, a tingling, a heaviness. For example, in the arm, you may notice your watchband or shirt sleeve at the bicep feels tight, or your arm feels stiff at the elbow when you try to bend it. Your lymphedema at this stage is reversible.

Stage 1 (mild) - when you awake in the morning your limb may be a normal size. The tissue is still in a "pitting" stage (when pressed by a finger the area indents and holds the indentation). This is called "Pitting Edema." Your lymphedema is reversible because no skin changes have occurred. You may be fine just wearing an off-the-shelf compression sock or sleeve.

Stage 2 (moderate) - the tissue does not "pit" (when pressed by a finger there is no indentation). There are tissue changes because of the inflammation. Skin is more swollen and is tough. You will need a custom garment and might be a candidate for surgery.

Stage 3 (severe) - the tissue at this stage is hard (fibrotic) and will be unresponsive to the touch. It may crack and weep fluids. Cellulitis is a common occurrence. The swelling is irreversible and the limb is very large and swollen, and is better known as Elephantiasis. Specialty wraps and garments and sometimes surgery can be a real benefit.