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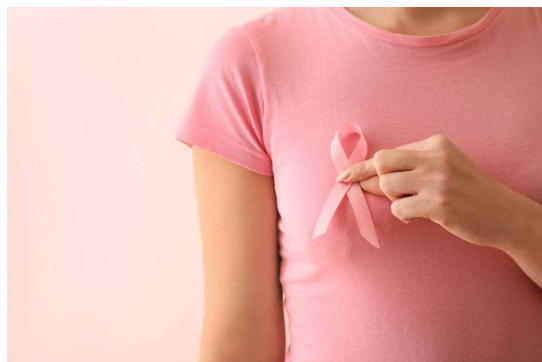
# Body Image & Lymphedema

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*“It always pains me to look at myself in the mirror. I am reminded of all my body has gone through. I lost my breasts to surgery for my cancer, and now I have to deal with lymphedema in my right arm. And unlike other treatments for my cancer that are now over, there is no end in sight with this lymphedema.”*



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*I used to be an avid runner and enjoyed my time outdoors. However, I was diagnosed with sarcoma on my right thigh and had to undergo surgery and radiation therapy. Just as I was ready to get past all of this, my right leg began to swell. I had to get my leg wrapped and treated...and it got better. But now I can't be as active as I would like to be. Some days I feel let down by my body and get upset. I keep telling myself that lymphedema can be managed.”*



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## Objectives

- Identify the effects of lymphedema on body image
- Describe the impact of lymphedema on health-related quality of life (HRQoL)
- List coping strategies to combat negative body image



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## What is Body Image and why is it important?

- Body image – how you see your physical appearance and how you believe others perceive your physical appearance. Is affected by your own beliefs and how you feel in your body (such as confidence in ability to do different activities/sports/chores).
- Physical function is part of body image self-concept.
- Cancer – often causes unwelcome changes in physical appearance and bodily function.
- Affects self-worth depending on personal investment in body physical integrity.



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## Effects of lymphedema on body image

- Visible body changes can debilitate perceived body integrity
- Swelling can interfere with perceptions of appearance
- Clothing choice is impacted by swelling (Oliveri et al., 2008).



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## Effects of lymphedema on body image

- Physical symptoms caused by LE can negatively impact BI (Ridner et al., 2012).
- Poor BI with lymphedema can negatively impact sexuality (Yang et al., 2011).
- Pain severity has been linked along with BI dissatisfaction to depressive symptoms in people with lymphedema. Improving pain associated with lymphedema may help decrease depression (Teo et al., 2015).



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## Effects of lymphedema on body image



- Individuals who have a greater difference in limb volumes report greater appearance disturbance (Rosedale et al., 2010).
- Negative body image has negative effects on self-confidence and sexual relationships (Rider et al., 2012)



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## Effect of lymphedema on health-related QoL

- Iowa Women's Health Study (Ahmed et al., 2008).
  - 1,287 women with brca –QoL lower those with LE, with a proportional relationship between the number of arm symptoms and reduced QoL
- Volume change correlates with negative psychological impact and negative social impact due to lymphedema



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## Strategies to improve body image



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### Think about what you like about yourself!

Things you notice about yourself don't have to be physical

Start small and go from there

Your eyes, how you look great in a certain outfit, the sound of your laugh, exceptional baking ability

Physical appearance is only a small part of what makes you YOU!



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## Notice the nice things people say about you



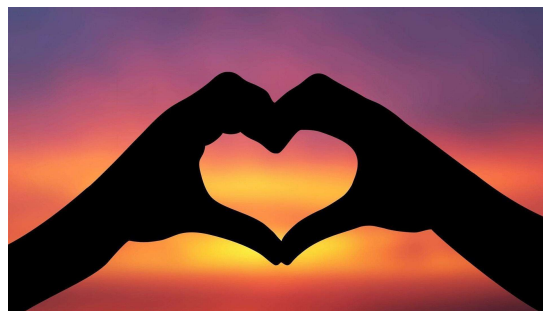
- Tune into and believe nice things people say about you
- Learn to love yourself
- Surround yourself with positive, friendly people who boost your self-confidence and provide support



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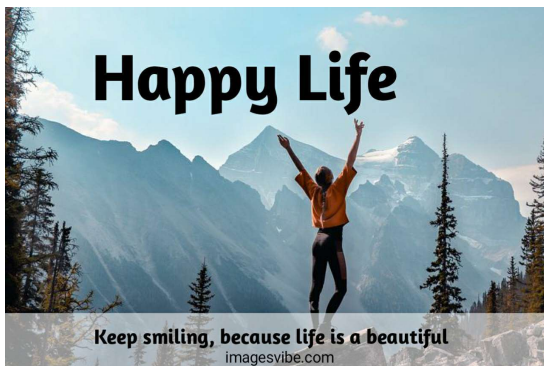
## Use positive self talk

- Recognize your thought patterns and counteract the negative
- Keep a journal to notice patterns
- Replace negative self statements with positive ones
- Practice self compassion –be kind to yourself



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## Stop trying to see your body as a problem



- Accept our bodies for what they CAN do, and not a problem to fix
- Focus on skills, talents, qualities, and values
- Keep a gratitude journal and write down all that brings you joy. See the good things in your life.



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## Get help if you are...

- Obsessively thinking about your body and appearance
- Withdrawing from people in your life or the things you enjoy
- Suffer with anxiety and depression
- Engage in risky, harmful behaviors (substance abuse)
- **EARLY INTERVENTION LEADS TO BETTER OUTCOMES!**



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## Thank you!



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