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# Back-to-School with Lymphedema: Building Healthy Routines for Success

## Introduction

The start of a new school year often brings excitement, structure, and the challenge of adjusting to new schedules. For children, teens, and adults living with lymphedema, the transition can also bring unique concerns—managing swelling, staying active, and keeping up with daily routines while balancing school, work, or family responsibilities.

The good news? With thoughtful planning, clear communication, and consistent habits, the back-to-school season can be a smooth and successful start for students and parents.

# 1. Establish a Consistent Routine

Routine is the foundation of successful lymphedema management. The shift from summer's flexible days to structured school schedules can disrupt self-care if not planned for.

- **Set clear times for care:** Create specific times for compression garment use, skincare, and self-MLD (manual lymphatic drainage). For parents, this might mean scheduling early-morning or evening sessions when the house is quieter.
- **Use reminders:** Phone alarms, planner notes, or sticky reminders help ensure these vital steps aren't lost in the shuffle of homework, carpools, or after-school activities.
- **Ease into it early:** Gradually reintroduce earlier bedtimes and morning routines a week or two before the first school day. This helps the body adjust to new rhythms while protecting time for lymphedema care.

# 2. Prioritize Compression Garments

A long school or workday often means hours spent sitting, standing, or carrying backpacks—conditions that can worsen swelling if not managed proactively.

- **Check garment fit:** Children and teens may have outgrown garments over the summer; adults may notice changes in fit after seasonal weight or activity changes. Have garments re-measured and refitted before the school year starts.
- **Keep spares on hand:** Pack an extra sleeve, stocking, or wrap in case one becomes uncomfortable, damp, or soiled.
- **Communicate with staff:** Children, teachers, and school nurses should understand the importance of compression wear and be supportive if adjustments are needed during the day. Adults may benefit from alerting supervisors or colleagues if garment breaks or adjustments are part of their self-care.

# 3. Build in Movement Breaks

Prolonged sitting or standing slows lymphatic flow, but short bursts of movement can counteract this.

- **Mini-breaks at school/work:** Encourage stretching, ankle pumps, or short walks between classes or during breaks. Adults can take standing or pacing breaks during calls or desk work.
- **Simple tools:** Exercise bands, stress balls, or discreet stretches can keep circulation going without drawing attention.
- **Family activity time:** Evening walks, bike rides, or stretching routines after dinner provide bonding and therapeutic benefits.

## 4. Pack Smart Snacks and Hydration

Nutrition plays a critical role in supporting lymphatic health, and back-to-school is the perfect time to reestablish healthy eating habits.

- **Hydration first:** Pack a refillable water bottle. Adequate hydration helps lymph fluid move more effectively.
- **Anti-inflammatory choices:** Fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts, and lean proteins help keep swelling in check.
- **Limit sodium:** Salty, processed foods can increase fluid retention, so keep these out of lunchboxes when possible.
- **Parent role modeling:** Parents who make mindful food and hydration choices set the tone for children while supporting their lymphedema care.

## 5. Manage Stress and Fatigue

The start of the school year can be overwhelming—new routines, homework, extracurriculars, and social pressures all add stress, which may trigger flare-ups.

- **Mind-body tools:** Teach and practice simple stress-relief techniques such as deep breathing, mindfulness apps, or short guided stretches. Children can use these during study breaks; adults can integrate them before meetings or bedtime.
- **Balanced schedules:** Avoid overcommitting to sports, clubs, or late-night study sessions. Adequate rest is just as important as activity.
- **Family check-ins:** Weekly family meetings to review schedules and commitments can reduce stress for everyone, ensuring time is protected for school success and lymphedema care.

## Final Thoughts

Back-to-school season is an opportunity to refresh routines and establish healthy habits—not just for students but also for parents and adults. Families managing lymphedema can begin the year with confidence and resilience by planning, communicating with schools and workplaces, and maintaining consistent care.

**Remember:** Consistency is the cornerstone of long-term lymphedema management. Children and adults can thrive throughout the year when daily care routines are woven into school and family life.



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