

Breast Cancer Survivor Facts and Fictions

Here's the 4-1-1.

September 16, 2019 By [Caroline Tien](#)

Lymph node removal during breast cancer surgery can lead to lymphedema—painful limb swelling that can become chronic. But much advice given to survivors isn't backed by solid medical evidence, according to Babak Mehrara, MD, of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City. Here's the 4-1-1.

Common Advice

Watch your weight.

Don't lift your arms above your head.

Take special precautions when you fly.

Stay away from heat and heat treatments.

Skip vigorous exercise.

Fact or Fiction?

Fact. Being overweight or obese doubles the risk of getting lymphedema.

Fiction. It's not backed by evidence.

Fiction. No need to wear, for example, special constriction sleeves. Flying is safe.

Fiction. On the contrary, some evidence indicates that heat therapy can actually reduce limb swelling.

Fiction. The opposite is true! Engage in both aerobic exercise and resistance training, which help offset symptoms regardless of whether weight loss occurs. For best results, combine with an anti-inflammatory Mediterranean diet rich in tomatoes, legumes and seafood.

Common Advice : Watch your weight.

Fact or Fiction? Fact. Being overweight or obese doubles the risk of getting lymphedema.

Common Advice : Don't lift your arms above your head.

Fact or Fiction? Fiction. It's not backed by evidence.

Common Advice : Take special precautions when you fly.

Fact or Fiction? Fiction. No need to wear, for example, special constriction sleeves. Flying is safe.

Common Advice : Stay away from heat and heat treatments.

Fact or Fiction? Fiction. On the contrary, some evidence indicates that heat therapy can actually reduce limb swelling.

Common Advice : Skip vigorous exercise.

Fact or Fiction? Fiction. The opposite is true! Engage in both aerobic exercise and resistance training, which help offset symptoms regardless of whether weight loss occurs. For best results, combine with an anti-inflammatory Mediterranean diet rich in tomatoes, legumes and seafood.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

<http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/article/breast-cancer-survivor-facts-fictions>