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	Fact or Fiction?
Watch your weight.	Fact. Being overweight or obese doubles the risk of getting lymphedema.
Don’t lift your arms above your head.	Fiction. It’s not backed by evidence.
Take special precautions when you fly.	Fiction. No need to wear, for example, special constriction sleeves. Flying is safe.
Stay away from heat and heat treatments.	Fiction. On the contrary, some evidence indicates that heat therapy can actually reduce limb swelling.
Skip vigorous exercise.	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.

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