
**Background:** The researchers wanted to determine the effectiveness of early physical therapy intervention in reducing the risk of post-op lymphedema in women with unilateral mastectomy or lumpectomy and axillary node dissection. The findings are important because this is the first study to demonstrate that early physical therapy may actually decrease women’s risk of lymphedema.

**Participants:** 120 women with unilateral mastectomy or lumpectomy and axillary node dissection participated in the study. 116 women completed follow up. There was no significant difference in the two groups in type of surgery, number of nodes removed, radiation or BMI, all known risk factors for lymphedema.

**Study Design:**

**Results:**
1. At 12 month follow-up the incidence of lymphedema was significantly lower in the physical therapy group at 7% (4 women) compared to 25% in the control group (14 women) (p=.01)
2. Women in the control group developed lymphedema more quickly after surgery
3. The study is the first to demonstrate the relationship between axillary cording and subsequent development of lymphedema.

**Implications for your patients:** Early physical therapy may be effective in preventing lymphedema in women post mastectomy/lumpectomy who have axillary node dissection. The physical therapists at TurningPoint are specialists in breast cancer rehabilitation with extensive experience in lymphedema and can provide your patients with individualized, evidence-based care.

www.myturningpoint.org
TurningPoint is a non-profit organization that improves the quality of life for women with breast cancer by providing, promoting and advocating specialized and evidence-based rehabilitation.