Hey everyone!! Welcome back for episode 23 of Lymphedema Podcast. Summer is here and if you are like me you are planning your summer travels. Extended vacation or staycation, weekend road trips, cross country flights, all-inclusive cruise to a beautiful beach, or a classic train ride. However, you prefer to travel lymphedema should not stop you. Medical safety must be considered so before you book your two-week cruise to Aruba, be sure you consult your physician first. Medications and pre-existing conditions should be taken into consideration when deciding how long the trip will be. Can you best tolerate a 2- or 3-day trip? You may want to take a road trip instead of cruise. Or even fly directly to your destination to decrease travel time and the amount of time in the air.

Road trips is a good place to start. I personally am not a good road partner. When we travel, I want to get to my destination as quickly as possible...it may be hard to tell by the sound of my voice but I don’t like to sit. And just forget sitting still. A good 6 to 8 hours is about all I can tolerate on a road trip and if you don’t live in Texas you can actually go to another state or even multiple states in that amount of time. When road tripping for travel keep these 5 things in mind.
1: Take advantage of rest stops. Even if you don’t feel like you want to stop because you are like me and just want to get there...take advantage of the break to stand up and walk around, adjust your garment or bandage if needed and get some water to drink.

2: While in the care do some exercises. Assuming you are not driving and said exercises will not cause a wreck. For leg lymphedema ankle pumps, butt squeezes, marching in place and ankle circles are good options. For arm lymphedema making fists, bicep curls, touching the roof of the car, and punching the air or air cycling with the arms are good options. Diaphragm breathing for 2 to 3 reps is a good option for any form of lymphedema.

3: If possible while driving do some light self MLD as needed. You can activate the head and neck region easily while sitting. As well as reach the inguinal and axillary lymph nodes. Of course, you will not be able to reach every point of your effect body part while sitting, if there is the option to sit in the back seat to stretch out then maybe you could reach the harder to reach places in that position.

4: SING!! It is the best part of a road trip. Singing loud stimulates the diaphragm and the diaphragm stimulates the thoracic outlet which returns the lymphatic fluid from the lower half of the body to the heart for reabsorption, circulation and eventually urination
5: wear comfortable clothes. I almost didn’t add this tip because it seems like most people travel in comfortable clothes, but it is worth mentioning. If you need to wear something nice where you are going leave time to change in a hotel before arriving. Otherwise wear loose fitting clothes that don’t bind or bunch while you sit.

Flying for travel is the fastest way to get to faraway places but it requires a certain level of planning before.

1: consider your luggage. Carry on vs check baggage. If your routine includes pneumatic compression you likely want to pack that in a checked bag. I recommend a layer of clothes on the bottom of the suitcase, then place you pump unit on top, surround the unit with you pump sleeves, and cover the unit and sleeves with more clothes to cushion the pump unit as best as possible. It can be an option to pack your bag in a carry-on suitcase so you can store it in the overhead bin, just prepare for TSA to rummage through it as it is an electric device going through the scanners.

2: TSA considerations. Have you doctor of certified lymphedema therapist write a letter on official letter head stating your condition and need for the supplies. It is likely they will bump you to pre board and potentially give you a lighter pat down in security.
3: Consider which garment is best for you. Compression is a must ESPECIALLY when flying. If you wearing the layered bandage wrap you will likely get a pat down and questioning. If possible, wear a compression garment that is low profile under the clothes when going through security. If you prefer to be bandaged for the flight get to the terminal early and bandage. Airports often have family bathrooms that are larger, or even a nursing room for moms you could borrow for a few to wrap in private.

4: if you normally wear open toe leg compression or a gauntlet for hand compression consider wrapping the fingers and toes. Lymph fluid takes the path of least resistance and while in flight the cabin pressure may push fluid to the fingers and toes even though that is not a normal “swell spot” for you.

5 Because the cabin pressure when flying is less than the atmospheric pressure it is recommended to wear a grade compression higher than normal. If you have upper extremity lymphedema that would be a 30-40 arm sleeve or 40-50 leg sleeve for lower extremity lymphedema. Often head and neck lymphedema patients are not encouraged to wear a face mask for the risk of causing tension on a plane. If you have head and neck lymphedema wear your compression garment for about an hour before the flight, during flight do self MLD, and put Compression garment on again after leaving the airport for another hour or two.
6 Hydrate by drinking water and wearing lotion. The pressure in the cabins is very dry. Plan ahead by applying lotion liberally the day of and by drinking more water than usual the day before.

7 Ask for an exit row, as long as you are capable of assisting in the event of an emergency. If you are not physically able request an aisle seat for a little more leg room, or upgrade if possible.

8 Wear comfortable clothing that is not too hot, tight or bunches when sitting. This can cause you to be uncomfortable for multiple reasons. Dress in layers if you tend to be cold, you can take off a light sweater if you get hot, but you can’t take off thick pants if you get hot…. that would be awkward…

9 Leave the space under your feet clear of bags. This will give you leg room to do exercises while in flight. Of course if you are sitting in the aisle seat you have the opportunity to stand and walk more without disturbing others on your row. It is important to stand up and walk once an hour in flight.

10 Enjoy the flight! Look out the window to see the clouds, watch a movie on the free app most airlines offer. Listen to an audio book or your favorite album. Whatever you prefer just enjoy the chance to travel.
Cruise ships often have so many amenities you forget you are on a boat. From the food to entertainment options you will be busy. These are my cruise ship tips when you have lymphedema.

1: Keep your routine. Continuing your CDT is important. Yes, you are on vacation, but your lymphedema never takes a day off. Some good ways to keep your routine is to join the daily exercise class they offer. Often times it is Zumba or Yoga, but it could also be a step or water aerobics class. If you pump daily bring you pump. If you wrap or garment daily wear them just as you normally would. Be active, continue your Manual lymph drainage and wear compression.

2: Enjoy yourself but not too much. The cruise buffets are famous for the endless options. Eat good! Your body will thank you. Enjoy some splurges but don’t post up at the all you can eat soft serve machine. Speaking from experience...soft serve and motion sickness do not go well together. Eat fresh fruit, vegetables and a variety of other delicious foods while trying to stay away from a lot of dairy and bread products.

3: This is not a scientifically proven statement, but I have seen it work on my patient more than once. Cruise pools are ocean water pools. They water is drained every night and then filled again every morning. Probably for cleanliness and to keep drunk people
from drowning on the boat at night….My point here is that a patient of mine swears that when she goes to the beach and get in the ocean her arm lymphedema goes down. Her measurements the day after arriving home have confirmed her claim. So swim in the salt water and then wear compression to maintain the effects of the salt water.

To recap I want to mention some general vacation tips:

1: Maintain your routine. Bring your pump, bandaging supplies and any garment needed on your trip. Make time in your day to rest, elevate, exercise, perform MLD, and apply compression. That sounds like a lot, and truthfully it is, but if you are used to this routine already it will be easier to follow. I don’t recommend starting a routine while on vacation…

2: Hydrate, both with lotion and water. Your skin and organs need hydration when traveling.

3: Avoid extreme heat and prolonged sun exposure. No one ever really goes outside and says “I want to get a sunburn today” so I feel silly saying don’t get a sunburn because who intentionally wants one. The main point is to avoid getting too hot or being in the sun too long. Wear sunscreen, a light long sleeve or cover up, and take frequent breaks from the activities to cool off.
4: go somewhere amazing and breathtaking…. or stay close to home. It really doesn’t matter as long as you are giving yourself a much-needed break from reality.

Thanks for listening to Lymphedema Podcast I hope you enjoyed learning something new today.

Mother Teresa says “Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty”  This podcast is here for you to find friendship and a community for your journey with Lymphedema.

I hope you enjoyed learning more about Planes, Trains, and Automobiles-summer travel Email me with your story if you would like to share. Lymphedemapodcast@gmail.com or visit the website lymphedemapodcast.com to submit a topic for another episode.