Blood draw after mastectomy

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Dear OncoLink "Ask The Experts,"

Twenty years post radical mastectomy, can a patient have an IV or blood drawn from the side of the mastectomy?

Lora Packel MS, PT, Coordinator of Cancer Therapy Services for the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, responds:

The issue is not the mastectomy itself, but the lymph node dissection. When lymph nodes are removed, there exists the potential of decreasing the body's ability to drain fluid from the arm, armpit and chest. For the vast majority of people, the remaining lymph nodes and veins can handle the removal of fluid without difficulty. However, for some, the lymphatic system can become overloaded, resulting in swelling.

Lymphedema (swelling caused by back-up of lymph fluid) can occur anytime after lymph node dissection (LND). Therefore, anyone receiving a LND should understand and follow lymphedema precautions, which include avoiding any trauma to the arm. Trauma can include blood pressures, IV's, sunburn or cuts.

For more detailed information regarding lymphedema, please refer to the coping with symptoms section on this website.

Lora Packel MS, PT

No