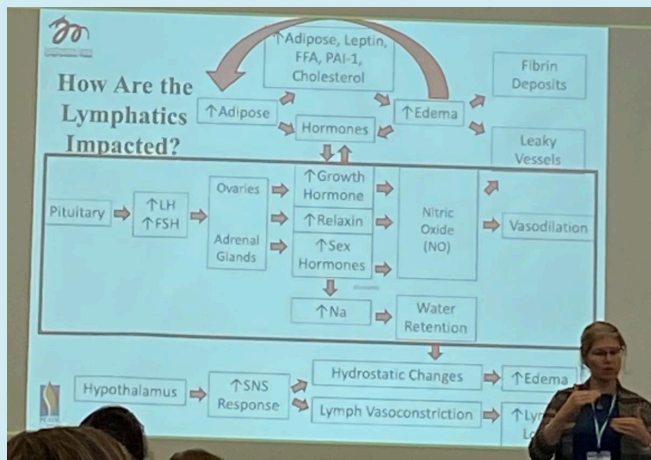




# Pregnancy and Lymphatic Disorders



## Pregnancy's Impact on Lymphedema and Lipedema

### Presentation Summary

**Dr. Shelley DiCecco, PT, PhD CLT-LANA, CI-CS** has specialized in pelvic health and lymphedema for 25 years. She owns LymphEd, LLC, a lymphatic education company, treats complex cases in Atlanta, and is

faculty in the Doctor of Physical Therapy program at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine in Suwanee, GA.

"How Swell is Pregnancy?" she asks with a smile. Every system in a woman's body can be affected by increased hormones, leading to fluid retention, the deposition of adipose tissue, and leaky vessels. The significant hormonal changes, along with the postural changes associated with pregnancy, can negatively impact the lymphatic system. This can cause initial lymphatic dysfunction or exacerbate existing lymphedema. Yet, few studies have applied new knowledge about the lymphatic system to pregnancy swelling, and clinicians are understandably cautious about treating pregnant women with lymphedema.

Dr. DiCecco collaborated with graduate student Kathryn Downing, PT, to conduct a literature review and worked with researchers Ria Lewis-Strange, BSc, and Diana Mehrez, BSc, BN, in Wales, UK, to further investigate this relationship. They have participated in focus groups, interviewed individuals about their experiences, and developed a survey for medical providers. Their preliminary results show there is a significant impact on the lymphatic system during pregnancy, and that the signs/symptoms are worse with each pregnancy and can mask serious complications.

Treatment of lymphedema during pregnancy must be individualized. There is limited research on each component of Complete Decongestive Therapy; however, it appears that all forms can be used with caution and under the supervision of both the therapist and the physician. Deep treatment in the abdominal area is not recommended.

Physical activity during pregnancy is recommended, taking into consideration the woman's current and pre-pregnancy physical condition. Aquatic exercise can be beneficial during pregnancy because water provides natural compression, a feeling of weightlessness, and resistance for movement exercises. Hydration is crucial during any form of exercise, and pregnant women should not continue exercising to the point of pain or fatigue.

Learn more about Dr. DiCecco's study at:

LymphEd - Pregnancy and Lymphedema



**Medical Providers**, help these researchers by sharing what you were taught, what you've learned, and what you feel confident about when treating pregnant patients with lymphedema. The goal is to develop tools to help support providers in delivering safe and effective therapy.

**They need to hear from you!**

**Please complete a survey about your needs and experiences with pregnancy & lymphedema.**

Use the QR code or click the button below.

Health Care Practitioner Survey

**Individuals with Swelling Concerns During Pregnancy or the Postpartum Period:** The team will launch a short international survey study for individuals who had swelling during pregnancy or the postpartum period in the near future. The hope is to include the information gathered from this study in the development of educational materials for healthcare practitioners and for the community. Individuals may email team member Diana Mehrez at [diana.mehrez@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:diana.mehrez@wales.nhs.uk) to join the contact list for the survey. Those on the list will be sent a link when this survey is live.

Editor Sharon Shepard thanks Dr. Shelley DiCecco and Deb Cozzone for their help with this issue!

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