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Grimes-Williams Lacinda  
lg1683@mynsu.nova.edu

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# Clinical Practice Skills and Educational Resources for Managing Lymphedema

Lacinda Grimes-Williams, OTD-S

Dr. Kaye Rubio, Ph.D., MHS, OTRL, CLT-LANA & Palms of Pasadena Hospital, HCA

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## Introduction

Lymphedema is characterized by the buildup of protein-rich fluid in the interstitium, which causes edema, chronic inflammation, reactive fibrosis, and adipose growth in the affected body areas (Keith et al., 2023). Self-management is an essential part of everyday practice for chronic lymphedema difficulties. Occupational therapists can address unique client needs by concentrating on the functional effects of lymphedema on occupational performance and engagement (Baxter et al., 2017). Rubio (2021) suggested that clinicians trained in lymphedema therapy would benefit from opportunities to acquire the skills and resources to adequately educate patients in self-management practices.

Figure 1. Treating Lymphedema | John Hopkins Medicine.



Note: Adapted from "Lymphedema hand bandaging" by John Hopkins Medicine, 2023, retrieved from <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/treatment-tests-and-therapies/treating-lymphedema>

## Site Description

HCA Pasadena Hospital Outpatient Clinic in St. Petersburg, Florida.

- Adults ranging in age from 21 to 92
- OT mentor is a lymphedema therapist primarily treating individuals with chronic venous insufficiency, cancer per/post radiation, and secondary lymphedema.

Figure 2. HCA Florida Pasadena Hospital.



Note: Adapted from "HCA Pasadena Hospital Outpatient Entrance" by HCA Florida Healthcare, 2023, retrieved from <https://www.hcafloridahealthcare.com/locations/pasadena-hospital/>

## Summary of Needs Assessment

Needs identified from the current literature review and by the certified lymphedema therapist at HCA:

- Awareness in the healthcare field of a suitable and timely diagnosis of lymphedema.
- Early treatment aids in decreasing the complication of lymphedema.
- The medical staff can provide lymphedema patients with more comprehensive care if they have a better awareness of the nature of the disease and the various treatment choices.
- Resources of preventative care and maintenance for patients pertaining to lymphedema.
- Development of self-management and exercise programs that patients can easily follow and perform in the home.

## Literature Review Summary

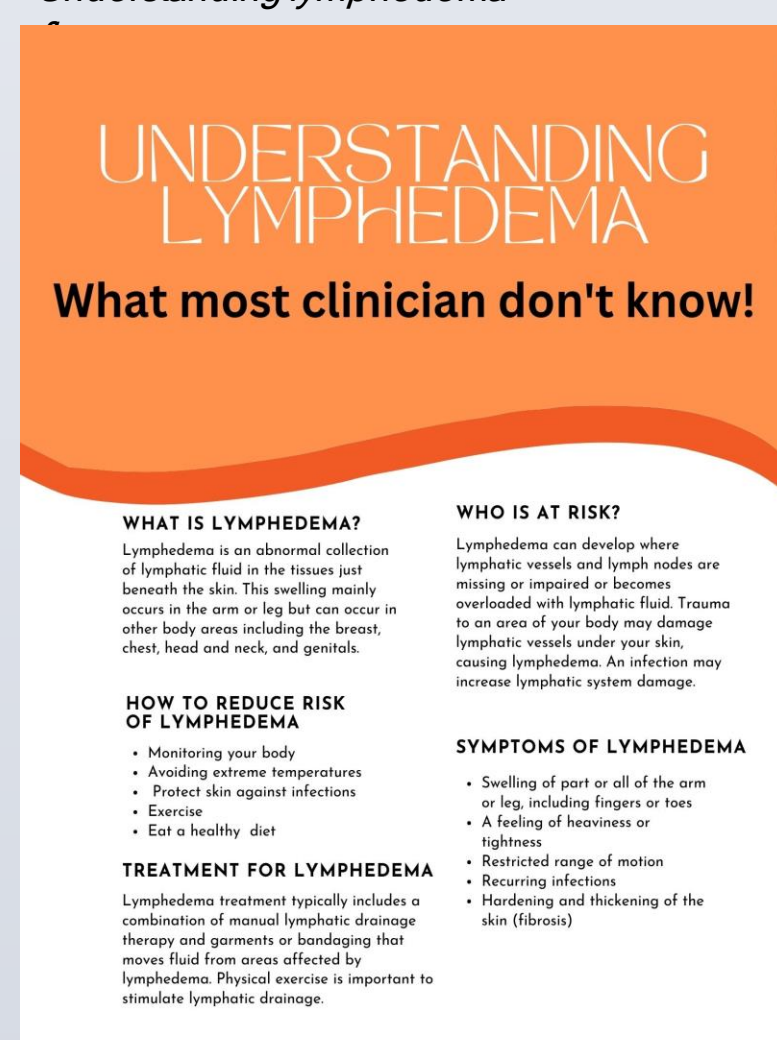
**Common Causes of Lymphedema:** Breast cancer is the most frequent cause of lymphedema in the upper extremities in the USA, and chronic venous insufficiency is the main risk factor for developing lymphedema in the lower extremities (Bjork & Hettrick, 2019). Lymphedema can also be caused by acute injury to lymphatic tissues, such as surgery, radiation treatments, or infection (Keith et al., 2023).

**Importance of Recognizing Lymphedema:** Treatment for symptoms of lymphedema should continue for the rest of one's life in order to manage the condition and avoid consequences (Keeley, 2021).

**Lack of Knowledge of Lymphedema:** The condition frequently goes undiagnosed until a patient develops significant health risks (Chang et al., 2021).

**Treatment of Lymphedema:** Educating patients on manual lymph drainage, compression bandaging, self-care, and exercises are essential because they allow the patient to have control over their care, as well as educating patients on the disease's progression, lifestyle changes, and techniques for improving activities of daily living (Lentz et al., 2021).

Figure 3 Understanding lymphedema



Note. By Grimes-Williams, L

Figure 4 6 ways to help manage lymphedema flyer



Note. By Grimes-Williams, L

## Capstone Project Description

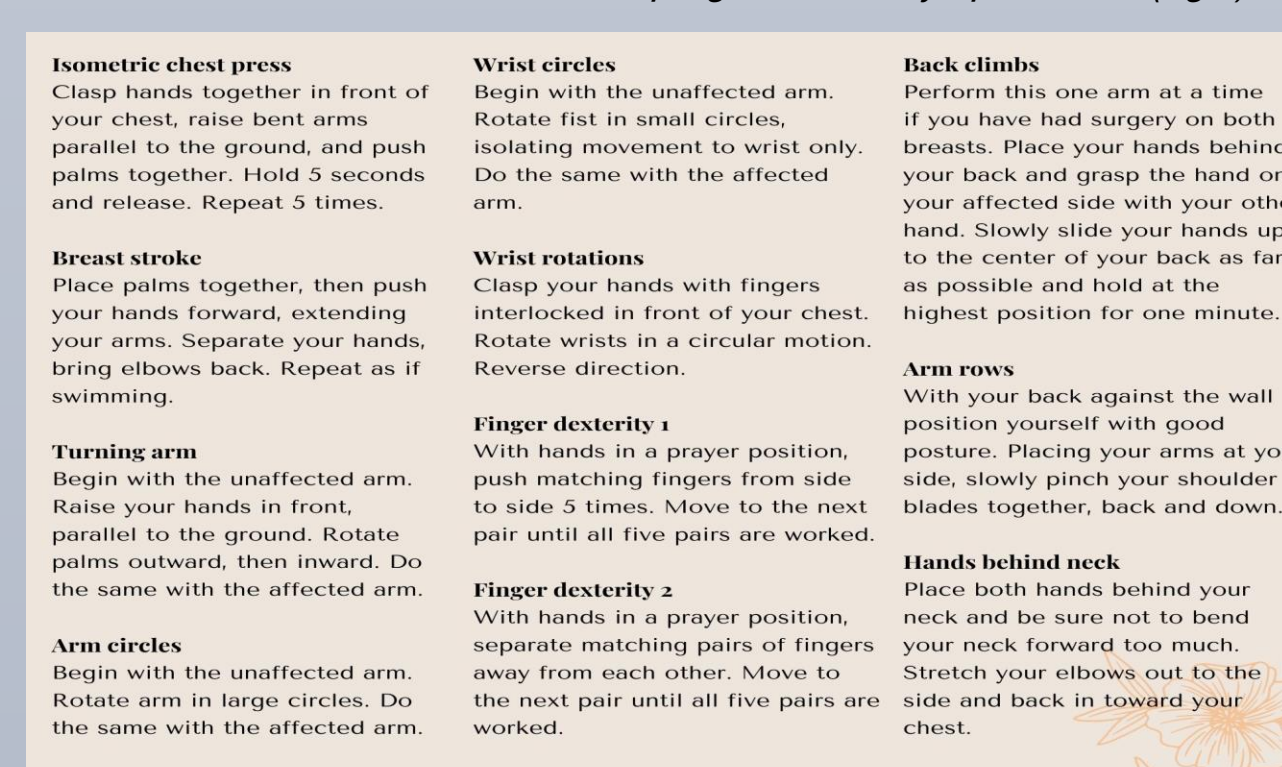
- This project aimed to provide individuals with lymphedema and practitioners with relevant resources that would support self-management, improve quality of life, and the ability to manage lymphedema successfully.
- As a component of my capstone experience, I created an educational binder containing self-care strategies and techniques, home exercise programs, health and nutrition, known risk factors and causes, manual lymphatic drainage massage techniques, scar massage techniques, compression strategies, and information about the distinct types of lymphedemas.
- As a part of my 16-week capstone experience, I performed various assessments and provided Complete Decongestive Therapy. I had the opportunity to treat clients diagnosed with lipedema, lymphedema, chronic venous insufficiency, arterial insufficiency, clients who had a lumpectomy, sustained an injury or surgery induced edema, and multifactorial lymphedema.

Figure 5 Phase 2- maintenance and exercise program for UE lymphedema (Pg 1)



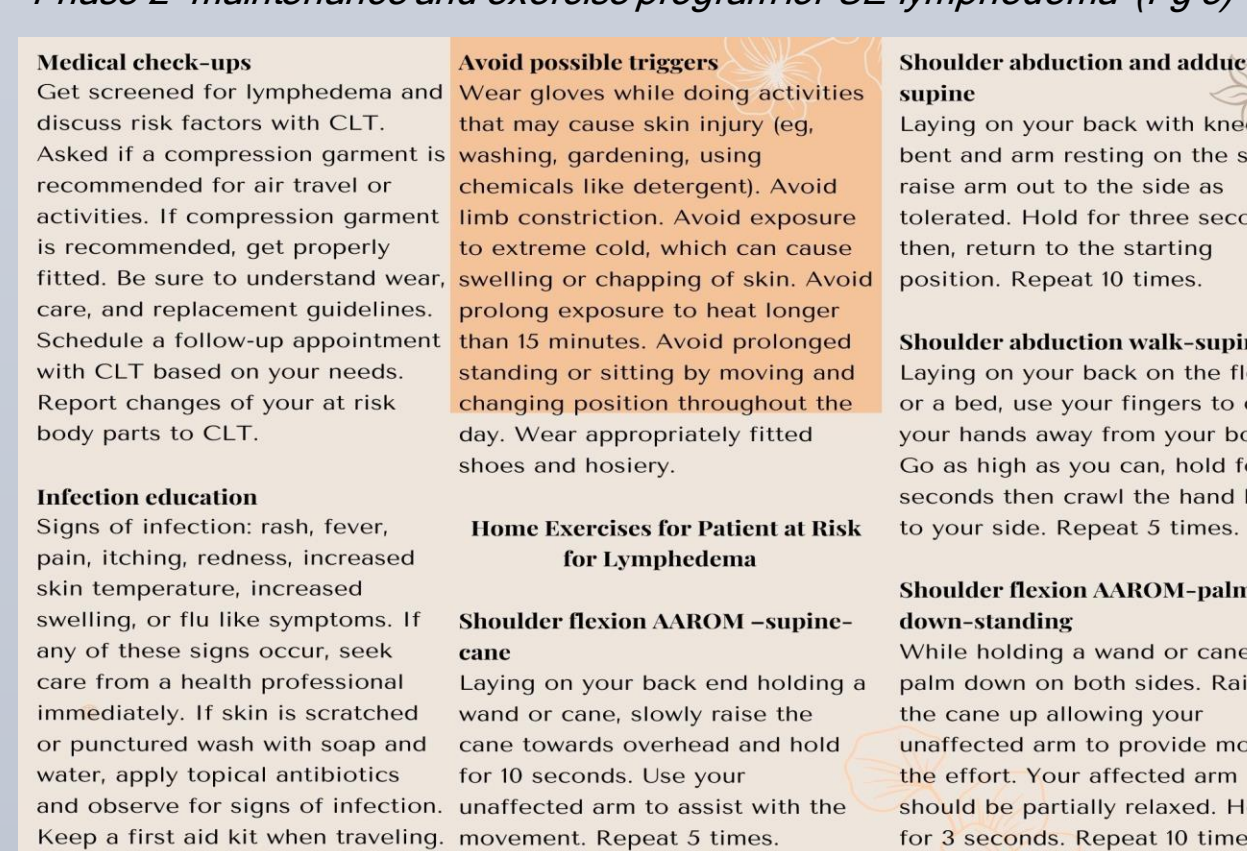
Note. By Grimes-Williams, L

Figure 8 Phase 2- maintenance and exercise program for UE lymphedema (Pg 4)



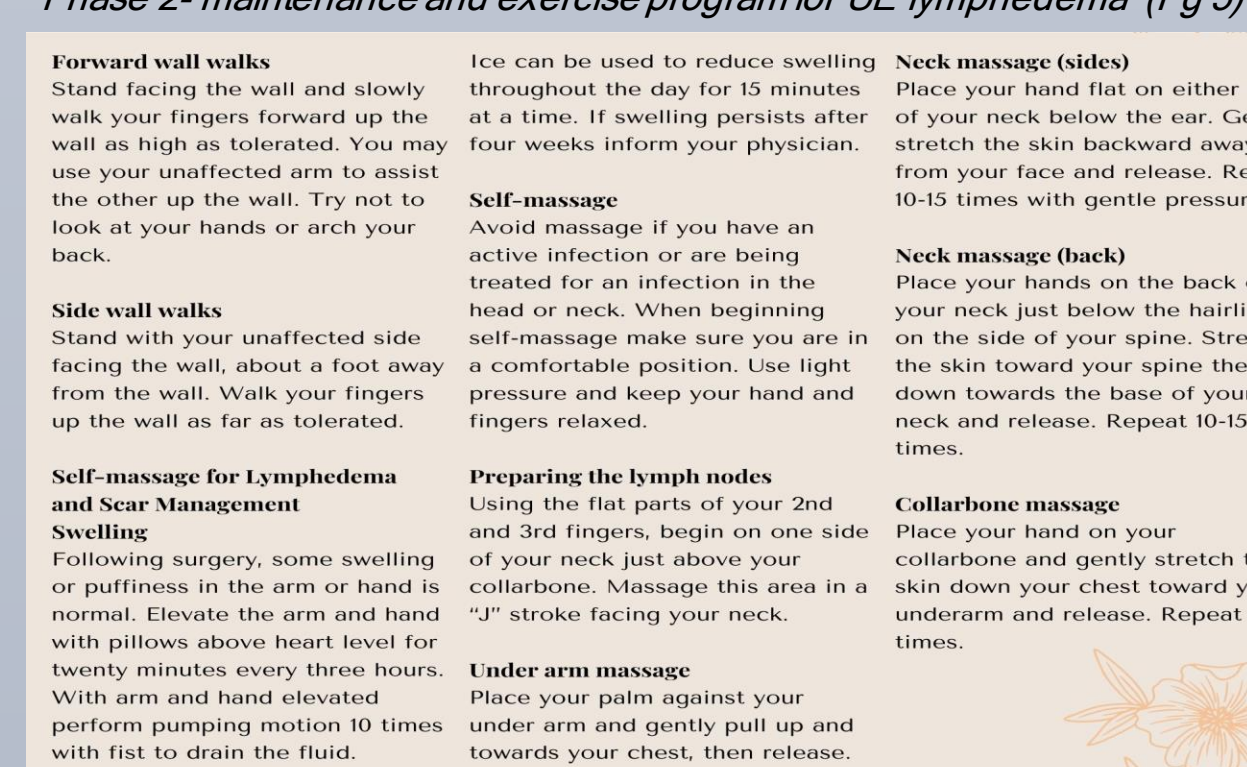
Note. By Grimes-Williams, L

Figure 6 Phase 2- maintenance and exercise program for UE lymphedema (Pg 3)



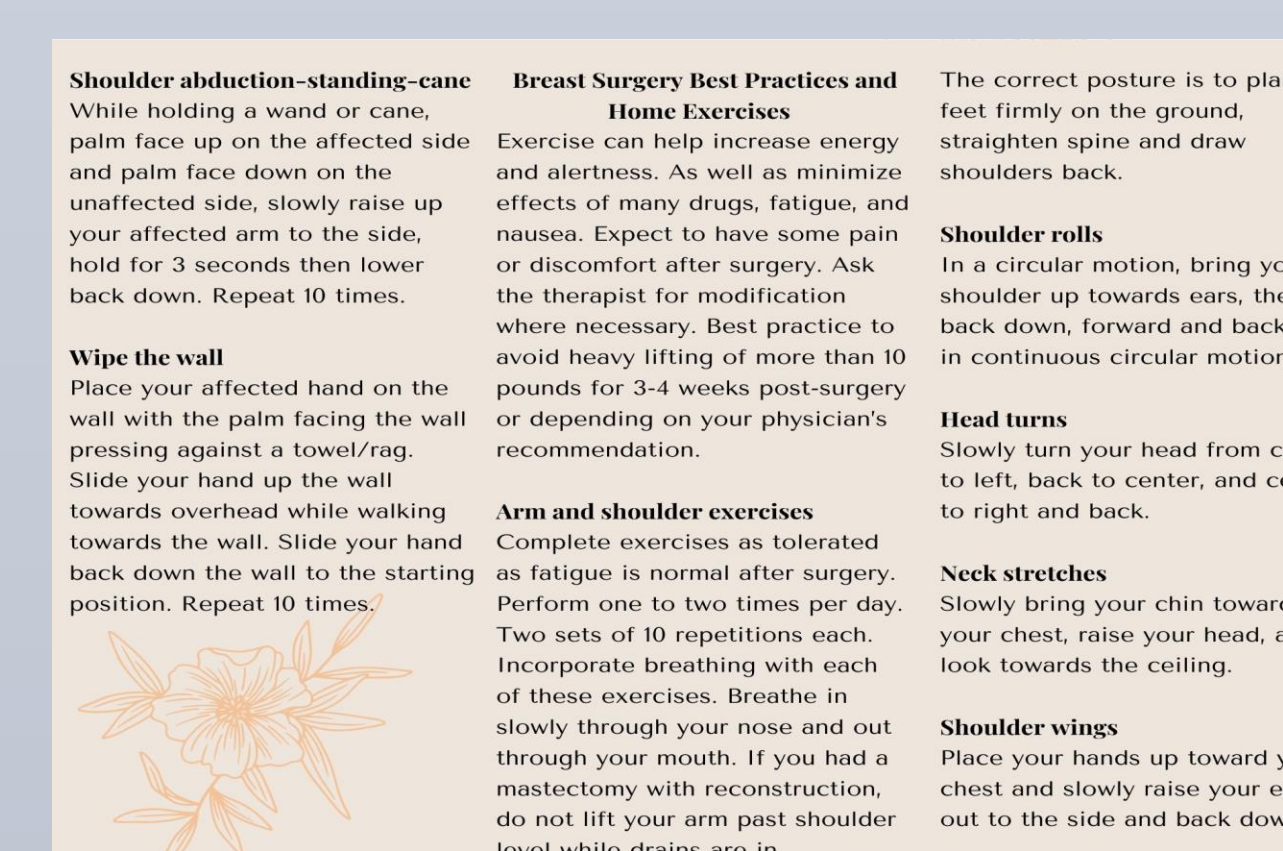
Note. By Grimes-Williams, L

Figure 9 Phase 2- maintenance and exercise program for UE lymphedema (Pg 5)



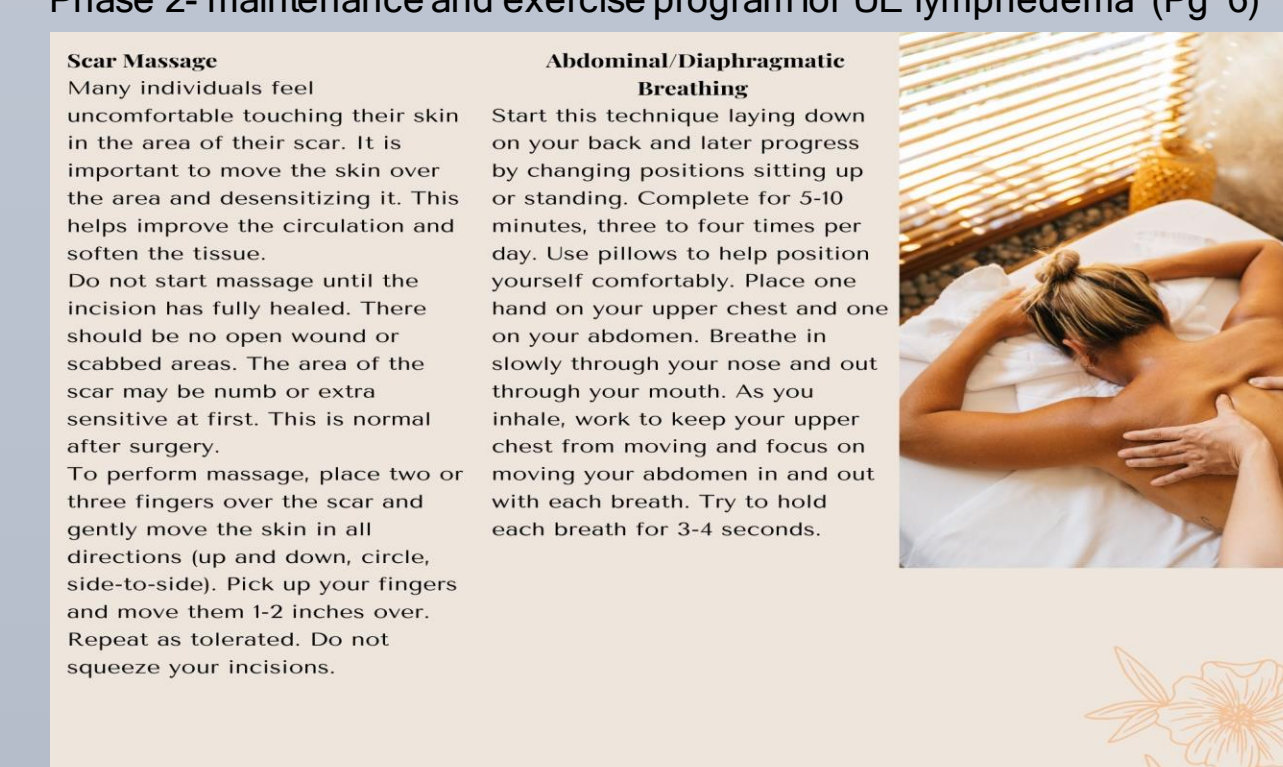
Note. By Grimes-Williams, L

Figure 7 Phase 2- maintenance and exercise program for UE lymphedema (Pg 3)



Note. By Grimes-Williams, L

Figure 10 Phase 2- maintenance and exercise program for UE lymphedema (Pg 6)

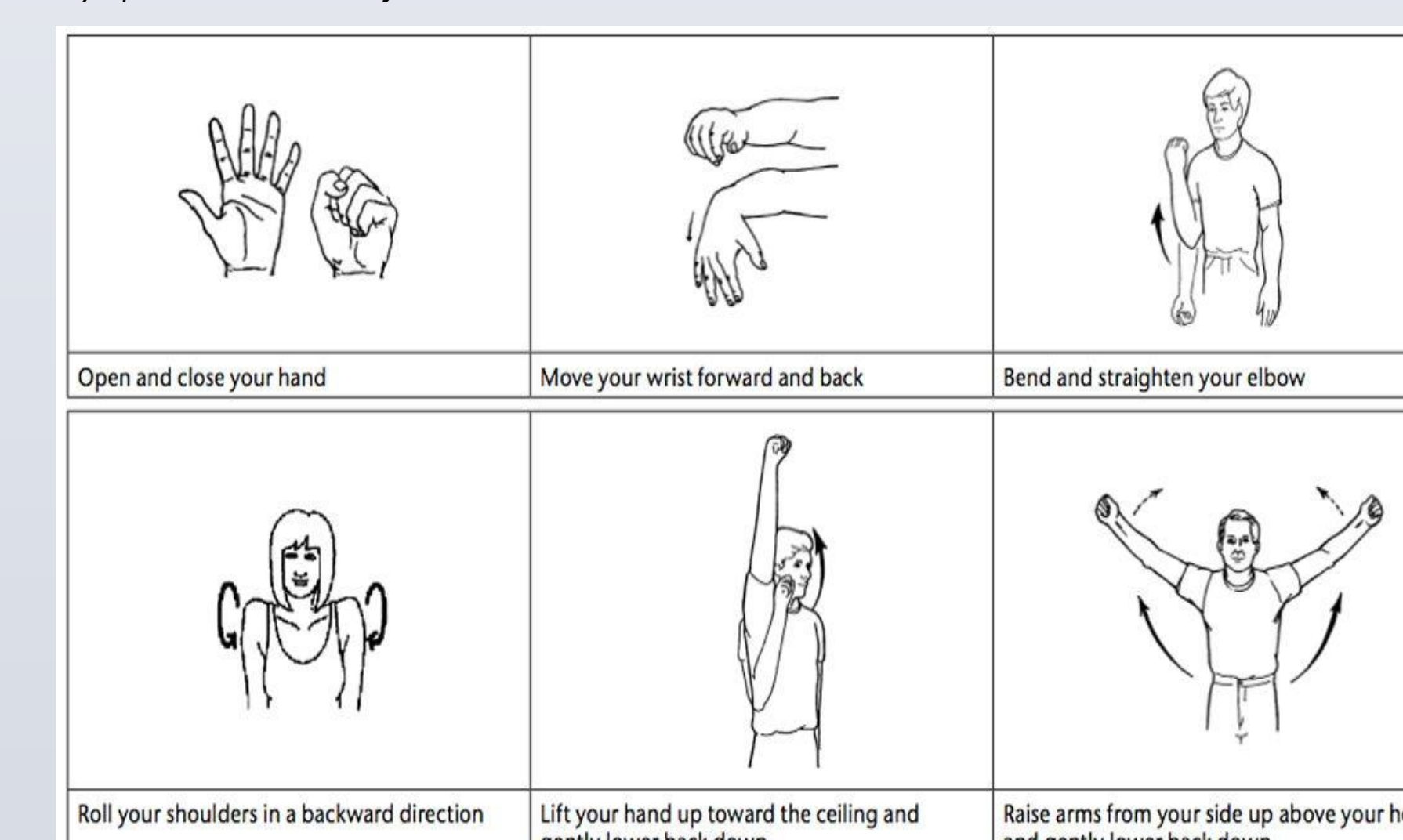


Note. By Grimes-Williams, L

## Learning Objectives Achieved

1. Independently developed an educational resource binder to increase the client's ability to manage lymphedema during phase 1 and phase 2 of complete decongestive therapy.
2. Developed clinical practice skills specific to lymphedema assessments and interventions to independently perform evaluations and treatments in the outpatient rehab clinic.
3. Professional development through completing online coursework and attending hands on skills lab focusing on Complete Decongestive Therapy.

Figure 11 Lymphedema exercises for the arm



Note. Lymphedema exercises for the arm, n.d., retrieved from <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/c4/6f/1b/c46f1bbff92d0b69fec8c0812feecce.jpg>

## Implications for OT Practice

- Occupational therapists have an opportunity to assist clients in overcoming challenges as research reveals individuals with lymphedema frequently experience occupational performance limitations.
- Continued client education about their diagnosis, symptom management techniques, and ways to boost their overall participation in ADLs and IADLs using occupational therapy services, which in turn improve their quality of life.
- Occupational therapists continued use of educational resources is essential to aid in reducing complications from lymphedema.

Figure 12 HCA Trademark



## REFERENCES & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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References Available Upon Request