

Lower-Extremity Lymphedema Is Associated with Risk for Skin Cancer

Skin cancer occurred twice as often in patients with lymphedema than in matched controls.

Chronic upper-extremity lymphedema after mastectomy is associated with excess risk for cutaneous angiosarcoma in the affected limb. Case reports suggest lymphedema also is associated with excess risk for other skin cancers (e.g., squamous cell carcinoma, basal cell carcinoma, melanoma). In this retrospective cohort study, Mayo Clinic researchers determined whether patients with lower-extremity lymphedema had greater risk for skin cancer than did patients without lymphedema. The study period was 2000 through 2020.

About 4400 patients with lower-extremity lymphedema (mean age, 62) were compared with 4400 controls, matched for age, race, and sex. Skin cancers were more likely to develop in the lymphedema group than in the control group (90 vs. 65 cases); this difference was highly significant on time-adjusted analyses (hazard ratio, 2.0). Among 24 patients with unilateral lower-extremity lymphedema, skin cancer was 2.7 times more likely to develop in the affected leg than in the nonaffected leg. Also, the mean number of skin cancers in lymphedematous lower extremities was significantly higher.

COMMENT

Lower-extremity lymphedema was associated with excess risk for nonmelanoma skin cancer. The results are biologically plausible, perhaps reflecting local immunosuppression and chronic inflammation, which could predispose patients to malignancy. Accordingly, clinicians should monitor affected limbs closely. — **Paul S. Mueller, MD, MPH, FACP**

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Anand NC et al. Association of lower extremity lymphedema and nonmelanoma skin cancers. **Mayo Clin Proc** 2023 Nov; 98:1653. (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mayocp.2023.02.030>)