

# Weight lifting and lymphedema

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In the past, weight lifting has generally been discouraged for breast cancer survivors who have lymphedema. But [a recent study](#), published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, reveals that weight lifting may not be so harmful, and actually may benefit survivors.

A total of 141 women were randomized for this study with half of the survivors entering a twice-weekly progressive weight-lifting program and half as the control group. Participants were required to wear compression sleeves while weight lifting, trained by certified fitness professionals, and assessed by lymphedema specialists on a regular basis.

Researchers concluded, "In breast-cancer survivors with lymphedema, slowly progressive weight lifting had no significant effect on limb swelling and resulted in a decreased incidence of exacerbations of lymphedema, reduced symptoms, and increased strength."

Another interesting aspect of this study was the fitness centers used were YMCAs that host [the LIVESTRONG program](#), a collaboration between the Lance Armstrong Foundation and the YMCA to develop programs specifically for cancer survivors and to certify trainers who understand the special needs of survivor population.

But before you start pumping iron, make sure you check with your doctor, nurse, or physical therapist to see if you are ready to start a program and find a certified trainer who is trained to work with lymphedema patients and can show you the exercises that will help.