Surgical treatment for lymphedema: a review of reviews

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Citation

Authors' conclusions
Lymphedema is the swelling of limbs caused by fluid accumulation, most commonly due to lymphatic injury caused by cancer treatment. Conservative management may confer insufficient control or be ineffective altogether, especially if lymphedema is advanced. Multiple surgical techniques have been developed with the intent of providing an effective lymphedema treatment option when conservative management fails. Rationale: Nonsurgical treatments are intensive and require extensive and time-consuming ongoing intervention, yet for some patients confers inadequate lymphedema control. Surgical intervention to restore lymphatic flow or remove excess tissue may provide a more effective, long-term treatment option. Controversy: Surgery is inherently invasive and poses risks. Relevant Questions: Is surgical treatment of lymphedema effective for reducing the size of an affected limb, and are its effects durable? Is surgical treatment of lymphedema more effective than nonsurgical treatment alone for reducing the size of an affected limb? Does surgical treatment of lymphedema improve health-related QOL? Is lymphedema surgery safe, and what are its associated complications? Have definitive patient selection criteria been established for surgical treatment of lymphedema?

Final publication URL
The report may be purchased from: http://www.hayesinc.com/hayes/crd/?crd=65146

Indexing Status
Subject indexing assigned by CRD

MeSH
Humans; Lymphatic Vessels; Lymphedema

Language Published
English

Country of organisation
United States

English summary
An English language summary is available.

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AccessionNumber
32017000380

Date abstract record published
19/09/2017