



**Lymphedema: A lesser-known breast cancer treatment side effect with lifelong impacts**

Video	Audio
Nats of bell ringing	
Sonya Goins	"I thought once I rang that bell, it was over. But it wasn't over."
	A few months after completing targeted radiation treatment for breast cancer, Sonya noticed swelling in her lower arm.
<b>Sonya Goins Patient</b>	"And I wasn't sure what it was. And they told me, 'Hey, you need to come into the emergency room. It might be an infection.' And (I) went to the emergency room, and they're like, 'No, it's lymphedema.'"
	Lymphedema is a chronic and debilitating disease in which tissue swelling is caused by an accumulation of fluid that's usually drained through the lymphatic system.
	About 40% of people who undergo breast cancer surgery where their lymph nodes are removed will develop lymphedema.
	"It was painful. It was hard to sleep because it just felt like my arm was, like, thumping all the time. And I noticed, like, particularly at the end of the day, like, I type a lot for my job. And I noticed, like, my arm at the end of the day would swell up."
Sonya Goins	"And to be honest with you, it was a little disheartening because I thought, 'Hey, this is over because, you know, you got the cancer. The cancer is gone, but now you have to live with the aftereffects.'"
	But she didn't have to live with it. Sonya did some research and reached out to her Mayo Clinic care team. She found out about a surgery to help patients with lymphedema.
Dr. Fahradyan	"When I met Sonya, she already had stage 2

	disease."
Nats surgery	
	Dr. Vahe Fahradyan is a Mayo Clinic plastic surgeon who specializes in breast reconstruction and lymphedema reconstruction.
<b>Vahe Fahradyan, M.D. Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery Mayo Clinic</b>	"In her particular case, because she had some remaining functional lymphatic vessels, we decided that we're going be able to do lymphovenous bypass surgery for her."
Nats surgery	
	Using special dye to identify the lymphatic pathways, surgeons use small incisions to reroute the lymphatic system by connecting tiny lymphatic vessels to tiny veins, creating a detour around the damaged lymph nodes. This new connection restores the body's ability to drain lymphatic fluids.
Sonya Goins	"I'm actually surprised at how well it worked."
	While lymphedema is considered an incurable disease, getting outcomes like Sonya's, where patients can easily manage the symptoms and improve their quality of life, is the ultimate goal.
Sonya Goins	"My symptoms are so minimal. I mean, I've gotten back to working out and stuff, and I'm able to swing kettlebells, which I couldn't do before. And my arm does not swell up at the end of the day. So that's amazing to me. And be able to sleep better, and there's no more pain."
	One major key to achieving that is early diagnosis.
Dr. Fahradyan	"Well, the message is that if you notice that you have arm swelling, or breast swelling or the lower extremities, it is not normal. You don't have to live like this."
	For the Mayo Clinic News Network, I'm DeeDee Stiepan.