

# ANNETTE'S STORY

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## **ANNETTE—BACK TO WORK, WORK OUTS, AND WEARING CAPRIS**

Annette went for many months without an accurate diagnosis of lymphedema, which affected both of her legs. Her doctor put her on diuretics, told her to wear support hose, and to keep her feet up. But that was impossible to do when she had small children and a factory job that kept her on her feet for 12-hour shifts. She ended up quitting her job. And though she was at home with her children, she said that her lymphedema caused her to “spend a lot of time trying to take care of myself. In trying to deal with my symptoms, I took a lot of time away from the kids,” said Annette. Several years after her diagnosis, she was introduced to the Flexitouch system and within months of using it, she was back at work in a new job. Annette said, “The Flexitouch has given me my life back. It’s just awesome!”

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Annette first noticed the symptoms of lymphedema about 10 years ago, at age 30. She’d undergone surgery for cervical cancer and her pelvic lymph nodes were removed during the procedure, but neither she nor her doctor connected the swelling with the surgery. One doctor diagnosed elephantiasis, but he didn’t have treatment suggestions. And still another doctor suggested that she could fix the problem with cosmetic surgery on her legs.

As someone who had been very active before her surgery, Annette could no longer play basketball with her family, go biking, or do any other type of physical activity. “If you have severe lymphedema like I had, your legs feel just like tree stumps,” said Annette. “It’s hard to even move, let alone exercise.” Unsure what to do or who to turn to for help, Annette grew discouraged and stopped seeking medical help. However, her legs continued to enlarge. Standing for any length of time became increasingly more difficult and she ended up quitting her job at the factory. “For over a year I didn’t work, and that was hard on me,” said Annette. “I’m really a people person, and I like that personal interaction.”

Even worse than quitting her job were the stares and rude comments she endured. “Hearing cruel comments bothered me more than anything else,” she said quietly. “It took a certain amount of bravery just to be out in public.”

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## RECEIVING THE RIGHT DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

When a staph infection in her legs landed her in the hospital, the attending doctor identified the underlying problem as lymphedema. “My legs had gotten so huge that they were weeping lymph fluid,” said Annette. The hospital physician recommended she go to a physical therapist who immediately began treating her with regular manual lymphatic drainage (MLD) and also taught her how to wrap her legs properly.

At one point, Annette tried using a more traditional compression pump, which is also used to treat lymphedema. “But it didn’t feel like a massage. It was more of a squeezing sensation. It didn’t do anything for me; it simply didn’t give me the relief I needed,” she said. Eventually her physical therapist recommended using the Flexitouch system as part of her home therapy program. Though skeptical after her experience with the traditional pump, she gave it a try and began to see improvement almost immediately.

## GETTING “PHENOMENAL” RESULTS

Within months of starting Flexitouch therapy, Annette had lost nearly 70 pounds. She credits the weight loss to the reduced fluid in her legs, as well as to an exercise program she was able to pursue once her less-swollen legs could tolerate more movement. She was able to get back into a fitness regimen—swimming, walking, and using the elliptical machine at the health club.

And, as her edema improved, she was able to move from a Class IV custom-made compression garment to a Class III garment. Annette explained that, “The Flexitouch really works for me. Lymphedema doesn’t affect my life the way it used to. I’m back to working part-time as a cashier in a retail store and really enjoying it.”

“The device gives me so much energy that I look forward to going out and doing things,” she continued. “My life has become a lot more sociable. I’ve gotten more involved with my church. Since the device entirely changed how my legs look, I’m much more eager to be around people.”

Annette uses her Flexitouch system daily on both legs, and she needs fewer visits to the physical therapist. Every few months she makes the 40-mile round trip to see her therapist for follow-up visits, MLD, and compression garment adjustments, but she has dramatically reduced the amount of time and money spent on office visits. She values the ongoing health provider-patient relationship she has with her physical therapist. Annette said, “I really appreciate the support and encouragement she gives me.”

Because the Flexitouch therapy has been a positive experience for her—and because she gets real results—Annette is very compliant with her treatment. Prior to using the device, this wasn’t always the case. “It’s tempting to just quit trying when you don’t see a difference with all your efforts trying to control lymphedema,” she said.

“But with the Flexitouch system, I see a world of difference. I had stopped wearing dresses, skirts, and capris because of the way my legs looked, but I’m now back to wearing them.” Even better, she said, is how her legs feel. “They feel so great after I use the device, since it does a very good massage. It keeps the tissue soft—my legs aren’t hard and stiff anymore.”

According to Annette there are emotional benefits, too. “I’m feeling really confident now. I also feel very fortunate to be able to use the Flexitouch—it has been a godsend for me. It’s phenomenal, it really is.”



**TACTILE SYSTEMS TECHNOLOGY INC.**

1331 Tyler Street NE, Suite 200  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55413 USA

TEL: 866.435.3948  
FAX: 866.435.3949

[www.flexitouch.com](http://www.flexitouch.com)

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Monday–Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. CT