

COURTNEY'S STORY



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LIFE THREW HER A CURVE BALL

The symptoms of lymphedema often take people by surprise. But the surprise was especially acute for Courtney, an outgoing high school student whose lymphedema is of unknown origin. “Learning that lymphedema is a lifetime condition was hard to hear,” Courtney explained. Her use of the Flexitouch system, however, has been “a godsend,” according to Courtney’s dad, Scott. Courtney explained that the device “makes me feel so much better. I just do a treatment when I first notice the symptoms, and I don’t worry” about waiting for a physical therapy appointment. “The anxiety is gone.” Clearly someone who seizes opportunities, Courtney chose lymphedema as her oral presentation topic in her freshman biology class in order to help educate her fellow students—and even her teacher—about her condition.

Getting a diagnosis was the first challenge faced by Courtney and her dad, Scott. She initially noticed symptoms of lymphedema at dance class. The swelling in her leg puzzled her since she knew she hadn’t injured herself. “When I first went to the doctor, he said the swelling would go away in 2–3 days,” Courtney explained. “It didn’t go away, so they started doing tests. When they still didn’t know what it was, I really started to feel nervous about all of this.”

Scott and Courtney sought opinions from several doctors, and Courtney underwent many blood tests, MRIs, ultrasounds, and CT scans. It wasn’t until they saw doctors at a children’s hospital in another state that Courtney was diagnosed with lymphedema—which the doctors said is extremely rare in teenagers.

“Learning that lymphedema is a lifetime condition was hard to hear,” Courtney said. “I was anxious about how it would change my appearance, and whether I could still play sports.” But her feelings changed when she began appointments with Jamie, a certified lymphedema therapist who performed manual lymphatic drainage (MLD). “At first MLD massage was a strange experience,” Courtney pointed out. “But Jamie explained things really well and taught me how to do massage on my own at home too, which was helpful.”

FINDING A LONG-TERM TREATMENT OPTION

Managing appointments was difficult, “Courtney was going for MLD therapy two or three days a week to keep the swelling under control,” said Scott. “That was a lot of time away from school for her and even more time away from work for me.”

Jamie thought that the Flexitouch system might be a good at-home treatment option and arranged for Scott and Courtney to receive a Flexitouch demonstration. Impressed by the results, Scott worked with a Flexitouch Reimbursement coordinator to obtain insurance coverage. “Tactile Systems coordinated everything to get coverage,” said Scott. “As soon as I signed the authorization, they got needed reports from Courtney’s doctors and worked with the insurance company. It was wonderful. They worked fast, too.” Within a few weeks Courtney was using her Flexitouch system at home.

Her daily treatment lasts about an hour. “Most of the time while I’m using it I’m doing homework,” Courtney explained. “Other times I watch TV, text my friends, or just relax.”

“I like using this device because, physically, my leg feels a lot lighter. After treatment my thigh and calf are reduced about 1 centimeter, and my knee and ankle are reduced about .5 to 1 cm.* I also notice that the Flexitouch system treats my entire leg, which is hard to do in an MLD appointment.”

“Using the device makes me feel so much better emotionally too,” she continued. “If I have a bad episode I can just use the device when I need to, on my schedule. So any anxiety, about waiting for a physical therapy appointment, is gone.” Scott noted that before she received her device, “if her symptoms appeared late in the day—even if we

called first thing the next morning—we could be waiting days for an appointment. The therapists’ schedules are tight. And in the meantime I used to worry.”

A CHANGE IN ATTITUDE

Courtney said that her attitude now is very different from her initial fear and uncertainty upon hearing her diagnosis. “I’m used to the idea of having lymphedema. And now that I’m in a routine with treatment, it’s so much better. I don’t worry about the long-term implications of lymphedema because my symptoms are under control.” Scott agreed about her change in outlook. “When she first noticed symptoms she said to me, ‘Dad I feel like a freak.’” But the Flexitouch system has given her control over the situation.

Her lymphedema hasn’t slowed her down, either. She’s still involved in volleyball as well as fast-pitch softball, and she performs in school plays, most recently in the musical “Cinderella.” Courtney still does everything that she did before, “but I’m definitely more careful. If there’s a close play in softball, I can’t slide into base; I have to take care to avoid infection. Otherwise having lymphedema hasn’t limited me.”

She wears her support stocking under her jeans at school, but wearing it with her shorts at softball games is perhaps the only time her condition is apparent to others. “She doesn’t let any of this get her down—she continues the activities she’s interested in. I give her a lot of credit for dealing with this condition,” said Scott.

“The Flexitouch has been a godsend,” Scott said. “Our hope was that the device could manage her symptoms as well as the frequent massages had done. It *has* done that, and we’re elated. So life is good.”

*Individual results will vary.



TACTILE SYSTEMS TECHNOLOGY INC.

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

TEL: 866.435.3948
FAX: 866.435.3949

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Monday–Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. CT

www.flexitouch.com

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