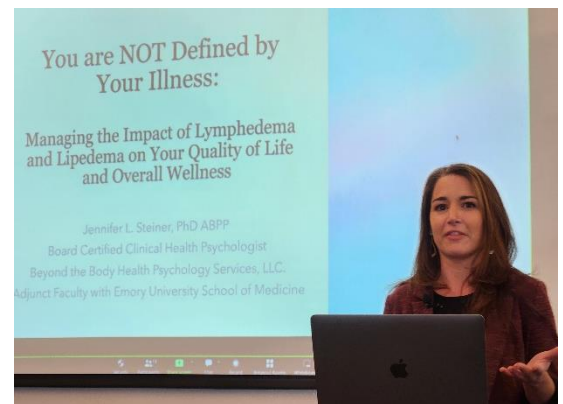




You are NOT Defined by Your Illness: Managing the Impact of Lymphedema and Lipedema on Your Quality of Life and Overall Wellness

Dr. Jennifer Steiner, PhD, ABPP, is a psychologist who specializes in helping patients with chronic pain and illness live their best possible lives. She acknowledges the difficulties of having a condition like lymphedema, including pain, fatigue, loss of control and function, changes in self-concept, and feelings of being misunderstood or stigmatized by society. Depression, anxiety, and anger are natural responses to having a chronic illness. And loved ones often feel helpless or have trouble communicating with the struggling patient.

Coping strategies focus on making efficient use of the patient's limited energy. This takes trial and error, as patients often overdo activities, 'crash,' and need extended rest periods. The patient must learn to anticipate energy levels, pace activities, recognize signs of fatigue, and build in breaks. The [Spoon Theory Metaphor](#) can help patients and caregivers communicate about fluctuations in energy levels and needs for the chronically ill. Caregivers can help the patient find new ways to accomplish goals independently, and encourage physical activity and social connections, making life meaningful.



Medical coping strategies include list-making, prioritization, and bringing support to medical appointments. Some medical providers can schedule double appointments for patients with complicated conditions. Role-playing before a difficult appointment can help a patient prepare for the best possible outcome.

As the patient proceeds through the stages of acceptance of a chronic illness, Dr. Steiner helps them identify helpful frames of mind. Thoughts dictate mood and can be helpful or hurtful. Self-talk as we anticipate a good or bad day can affect our physical response, perhaps leading to more energy versus more inflammation. Substituting helpful thoughts, like "This is the hand I was dealt, but these are the things I can do," may help the patient cope more successfully.

Find a board-certified psychologist at: [Directory – ABPP](#). Reach Dr. Steiner at: [Beyond the Body Health Psychology Services-Online Therapy for Pain and Illness \(beyondthebodypsych.com\)](#)

~Reviewed by LLN Newsletter Editor, Sharon S. Shepard

Article published in The Lighthouse Lymphedema Network Newsletter, November 2023.

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Lighthouse Lymphedema Network is a 501(c)(3) organization with the goals of educating, increasing awareness and providing support for individuals who have lymphedema or have an interest in lymphedema. All donations are tax-deductible. [Donate](#) now.