

Relax while Boosting Your Immune System

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Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

The Benefits of Lymphatic Massage

Fuel Wellness with a Healthy Lymph System

Cathy Ulrich

Six months after hip replacement surgery, Larry was learning to walk again and life was returning to normal. But one thing still puzzled him. When he stood for any length of time, his left ankle would swell, and when the inflammation was at its worst, his right ankle would also swell.

"I can understand why my left leg is swollen," he says. "But why would my right leg swell? I didn't have surgery there. And why am I getting swelling six months after the surgery? Shouldn't it be better by now?" The answer is that although Larry's surgery had occurred on the opposite side, the right leg would swell when the inflammation became too much for the left side to handle.

from the tissues, but few understand there is another equally vital system of vessels that removes cell wastes, proteins, excess fluid, viruses, and bacteria. The lymph system picks up fluids and waste products from the spaces between the cells and then filters and cleans them.

Like the roots of a tree, the lymph system starts as tiny vessels--only a single-cell wide--that eventually branch into larger and larger tubes that carry these fluids back to the blood stream. This network of delicate vessels and lymph nodes is the primary structure of the immune system. The lymph nodes act as check points along the pathways of the vessels. They filter the fluid (called lymph) and serve as the home for

*Be happy for
this moment.
This moment is
your life.*

-- Omar Khayyam



Athletes, post-op patients, and those feeling over-tired can benefit from lymphatic massage.

Fortunately, lymphatic massage can help address Larry's problems. This special type of bodywork, while very gentle and seemingly superficial, helps to restore function to the lymph system and balance the body.

The Lymph System

Most people are familiar with the body's vessel system that carries blood to and

lymphocytes--little Pac Man-like cells that attack and destroy foreign bacteria and viruses and even abnormal cells, like cancer cells.

When the lymph system works well, we feel healthy and have a strong defense against illness. When it's sluggish or

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blocked--say after surgery or an injury--we can have swelling, feel tired, and be more susceptible to colds and infections.

Lymphatic Massage

A customized form of bodywork, lymphatic massage may help the lymph system do its job better. By understanding the anatomy and function of this delicate system, your massage therapist can assist your body in clearing sluggish tissues of waste and swelling.

Though lymph vessels are found throughout the body, most of them--about 70 percent--are located just below the skin. These fragile vessels work to pick up fluids between the cell spaces when gentle pressure is applied to them from increased fluid build-up, muscle contractions, or the pressure of a therapist's hands. By using very light pressures in a rhythmic, circular motion, a massage therapist can stimulate the lymph system to work more efficiently and help it move the lymph fluids back to the heart.

Furthermore, by freeing vessel pathways, lymphatic massage can help retrain the lymph system to work better for more long-term health benefits.

Massage therapists versed in lymphatic drainage therapy, an advanced form of lymphatic massage, can identify the rhythm, direction, and quality of the lymphatic flow and remap drainage pathways.

Who Should Get It?

Lymph massage can benefit just about everyone. If you're feeling tired and low on energy, or if you've been sick and feeling like your body is fighting to get back on track, lymph massage would likely serve you well.

In addition, athletes, surgical patients, fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue sufferers, as well as those wanting a fresh look may want to consider lymphatic massage. Here's why.

After a sports injury or surgery, lymph vessels can become overwhelmed with the demand placed on them. When tissues are swollen, deep tissue techniques may actually cause damage to

the lymph vessels and surrounding structures. Lymphatic massage is often the treatment of choice, because it helps the body remove proteins and waste products from the affected area and reduce the swelling. This helps reduce pressure on cells and allows them to reproduce faster to heal the body.

Surgical procedures involving lymph node removal--such as breast cancer surgery--can cause limbs to swell. Severe limb swelling needs the attention of a medical team, but in milder cases, lymphatic massage alone may be enough to prevent or even treat the swelling. It's important that your doctor be involved in your care. Let your doctor know you'd like to see a massage therapist and make sure you have medical approval.

Lymph massage can also be part of a care program for fibromyalgia or chronic fatigue syndrome. Because it's so gentle,

it is well tolerated by these patients, who are often experiencing sore trigger points throughout the body. And by encouraging lymph flow and removing waste products, this gentle form of bodywork can help restore immune function and improve vitality.

Estheticians are trained in a very specific form of lymphatic massage. When you get a facial, your esthetician will gently massage your face to help improve lymph flow. When lymph is moving freely in the face, you'll have clearer, healthier skin without a buildup of toxins and fluids.

So, if you're feeling a bit sluggish, experiencing mild to moderate swelling, recovering from a sports injury, or interested in optimizing your lymph system for stronger immunity, ask your massage therapist about lymphatic massage. It can have a powerful impact



Lymphatic massage can help increase immunity and get you back on your feet after an illness.

Facial Massage for Lymphatic Drainage

Natalia Doran

A well-performed facial massage will help relieve puffiness and improve skin tone and complexion. Other physical benefits include stimulation of the skin's immune mechanisms, firming of weak muscles, tissue regeneration, and antiaging effects. Mental benefits include stress relief and a greater awareness of the body-mind connection. And applying pressure and movement through massage can help to normalize the function and composition of the connective tissue, and free it of harmful substances.

Lymphatic Massage

The body's lymphatic system drains away the debris from our cells. It transports water out of the tissue, along with waste substances: bacteria, cell fragments, immobile cells, inorganic substances, large molecular fats, proteins, and viruses. This process is constantly happening all over the body. With massage, the lymph system can move up to 10 times more fluid than it normally does.

Manual lymph drainage (MLD), which was developed by Emil Vodder, PhD, is a type of gentle massage that accelerates the natural circulation of the lymph and encourages its movement away from swollen areas. MLD is firm, but gentler than ordinary massage. Because the lymph vessels are all interlinked, lymph flow will be affected in the entire region of the area being massaged. Other types of lymphatic massage include lymph drainage therapy, developed by Bruno Chikly, MD.

A facial massage that involves lymphatic work improves circulation to the skin, which increases nutrition to the skin cells and speeds up the filtering of water in and out of cells. The vasodilation of the surface capillaries during massage improves skin color, and facial massage also improves elasticity and suppleness of the skin. With facial massage, the skin becomes more balanced, less prone to breakouts, and more resistant to infection. Massage movements also influence muscular hypertension

through the autonomic nervous system.

Natalia Doran, MD, is the founder and president of the International Skin Beauty Academy in Illinois.



Facial massage has a host of health benefits.

Boost Your Immune System

Lymphatic Drainage Therapy Fights Infection

Does your immune system work overtime? If so, you might want to give it a boost by seeing a massage therapist or bodyworker trained in lymphatic drainage therapy. This technique can boost your immunity by increasing the production of antibodies, stimulating circulation, moving congestion out of the body, and reducing swelling, especially after surgery.

The lymphatic system supports our body's immune function and involves several organs, glands, and tissues, hundreds of lymph nodes, and a network of vessels. A clear lymph fluid flows through these vessels and carries the metabolic waste (bacteria, dead cells, fats, fluids, proteins, and viruses) to the lymph nodes, where it is filtered. These nodes often swell when we are sick.

The lymphatic drainage techniques used by massage therapists and bodyworkers gently stimulate lymph nodes, help correct swelling and stagnation in those nodes, reduce local fluid retention, boost the overall immune system, and provide relaxation. As an essential tool in the treatment of lymphedema (excess lymphatic fluid), this therapy is often applied postoperatively and can be especially beneficial for breast cancer patients.

Administering this treatment requires advanced training and is performed with gentle, massage-like strokes. There should be no discomfort involved; in fact, you may feel you are hardly being worked on at all.

Aftercare

After your lymphatic drainage

treatment, it's possible you could feel some mild, flu-like symptoms, depending on how much strain your body has been under prior to treatment. This strain may be due to environmental pollutants, medication, and diet. Most people leave a session simply feeling relaxed, but if you don't feel at the top of your game, drink plenty of water, limit your salt intake, and stay physically active.

Lymphatic drainage is one way to give your wellness a boost in a busy world that makes many demands on your immune system.

*Try to be a
rainbow in
someone's cloud.*

-- Maya Angelou

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