

# Integrated Manual Lymphatic Drainage with Acupressure and Essential Oils

OR

## An East-West Approach to Manual Lymphatic Drainage

By

Wolfgang Luckmann A.P., LMT. Dip.Hom.( Homeopathy )

Traditional massage therapy as practiced in Swedish and medical massage will increase circulation resulting in better distribution of nutrition and oxygenation of tissues. There is also an increase of water content in local interstitial tissues which will also stimulate the formation of lymph fluid and contribute to an increase of lymphatic fluid returning to the venous system.. Traditional massage therefore , positively affects the circulation of blood and lymph fluid ,provided the patient has a healthy and sufficient lymphatic system.

However , in the case of lymphedema or where the lymphatic system is already overburdened due to poor circulation and an overload of toxins., traditional massage is contraindicated. The same can be said for an insufficient lymphatic system due to breast cancer surgery, where the axillary lymph nodes have been removed.

The reason for the contraindication is that traditional massage releases histamines from the mast cells in skin areas where traditional massage techniques are applied Histamines cause a dilation of the capillary sphincters and therefore vasodilation or what is referred to as active hyperemia.. In addition more capillary pressure is created and therefore more capillary filtration which is desirable in a healthy circulatory and lymphatic system. Yet this also means an increase of water content in the already swollen body parts , increasing the risk of lymphedema or making that pathological condition worse when already present.

How to treat then , pre-existing edematic conditions or people at risk of lymphedema , safely and effectively ? The answer may well lie in an integrated and global, holistic approach. A definition of a holistic approach within the context of the subject matter , would be a treatment that re-connects mind-body-spirit.

A plan is called for that also addresses both short term and long-term goals, so as to make treatments more effective and permanent. . This approach is based on the Traditional Chinese Medicine ( TCM ) view of the nature of edema

being short and abrupt ( Yang edema ) or slow and insidious in its cause and effect ( Yin edema ) . The plan of treatment should have thus short and long term goals ( Lee, Miriam – Insights of a Senior Acupuncturist – Blue Poppy Press, Boulder, Co. – 1992 ) .

The most common type of edema found in the massage therapy clinic is the Yin edema. This edema takes weeks and months to grow. It starts at the top of the feet and ankles, slowly creeping up the legs and settling in the waist. Yin edema is systemic and involves multiple organs like kidneys, liver, intestines and the spleen. It is caused by a combination of toxic and excessive diet ; lack of exercise or regular sustained movement; incorrect breathing ; negative stress on the mind ; often pathologies of the organs themselves and trauma to the physiological systems caused by operations.

Whether your understanding of edema is from a Western or Eastern perspective, the fact remains that the causes and effects of edema or edematous conditions are systemic, involving various physiological systems . They are also long term mostly. Briefly explained, the lymphatic system plays a major role in the body's immune system mechanism. The immune or defence system is however not just limited to the lymphatic system but linked with all physiological systems and hence, every organ of the body.

In addition ,in both Western and Eastern medicine, the mind can significantly contribute to the causes and establishment of edema. According to psycho neuro - immunologists, unresolved negative emotional conflict can undermine the immune system in the long run. One just has to read Hans Selye's pioneering research on the effect of long term psychological stressors on immune health ( Selye, Hans – "Stress and Disease"- Science, Oct. 7,1955; 122: 625-631 )

From a Western perspective, the following principal organs of elimination are heavily involved in the lymphatic system: the liver, kidneys, spleen and intestines. In TCM , the same organs are involved with special emphasis on the spleen. But why single out the spleen?

Again from a Western perspective, the spleen is the largest lymphatic organ and has the same filtering function as the lymph nodes. It also produces white blood cells called T-lymphocytes, which form an important part of the immune system.

In TCM, the spleen is part of the Earth element and is responsible for metabolism and transportation of nutrients and liquids. It is a partner of the stomach. Whereas the stomach physically ripens and rots the food, the spleen is concerned with absorption and distribution of all nutritious essences to all systems of the body. The metabolizing and breaking down into nutrients is essential, if the food and liquids are not to stagnate in the stomach and intestines and turn into a damp slush.

This condition is termed as “dampness” in TCM. The non-metabolised food and drink turn into toxins and get stored in the fat of the person. Think of a pool of stagnant water in the street. Insects lay their eggs in it; dust settles in it; waste products of cars; airborne toxins all settle in and on it; while the sun ”cooks” it to a poisonous slush.

Another function is “sprinkling” or moisturizing all the systems of the body as it sends fluids upwards to the lungs. Also it assists the stomach in sending the “turbid” or toxic liquids into the intestines and ultimately the bowels. The spleen physically controls the nourishment of muscles and flesh. Part of its function is also controlling blood and lymph.

In TCM, diabetics and patients with Fibromyalgia and Chronic Fatigue have consistently weak spleens or weak spleen qi. Their digestion is sluggish and stagnating and overall circulation of blood, lymph and body fluids is slow and impaired. These patients will complain of overall pain, diarrhea and or IBS and fatigue. Movement, change is essential. In the picture below the therapist squeezes or pumps the spleen organ like an accordion for a minimum of two minutes. The result is an amazing resurgence of qi.



Picture 1. Contracting or "pumping" manipulations on the spleen organ for moving spleen qi

Emotionally, the spleen is responsible for negative worry and obsessive thinking. From a positive viewpoint, it helps absorb information and logically categorize it, as in reading a book or listening to a lecture. Muddled thinking and so-called "Fibro fog" is evidence of weak and stagnant spleen qi.

Pumping or contracting the spleen ( see Picture 1 ) is followed by acupressure on the stomach and spleen meridians, locally and distally to move the stagnant qi ( see Picture 2 ) If there is sensitivity on the points, the therapist, with pressure not exceeding the weight of a coin, rotates gently counterclockwise ( right to left as viewed by the therapist ) until the sensitivity is gone. This disperses the stagnant qi. Then the therapist reverses the rotational flow to clockwise ( left to right) to tonify or strengthen the qi in the organ. The rotation of fingers or thumbs on acupressure points is based on ancient TCM principles of acupuncture for propagating and enhancing Qi flow.



Picture 2: Local acupressure on Stomach 25 for better digestion and metabolism within the spleen and intestines. Pressure is like that of the weight of a coin.

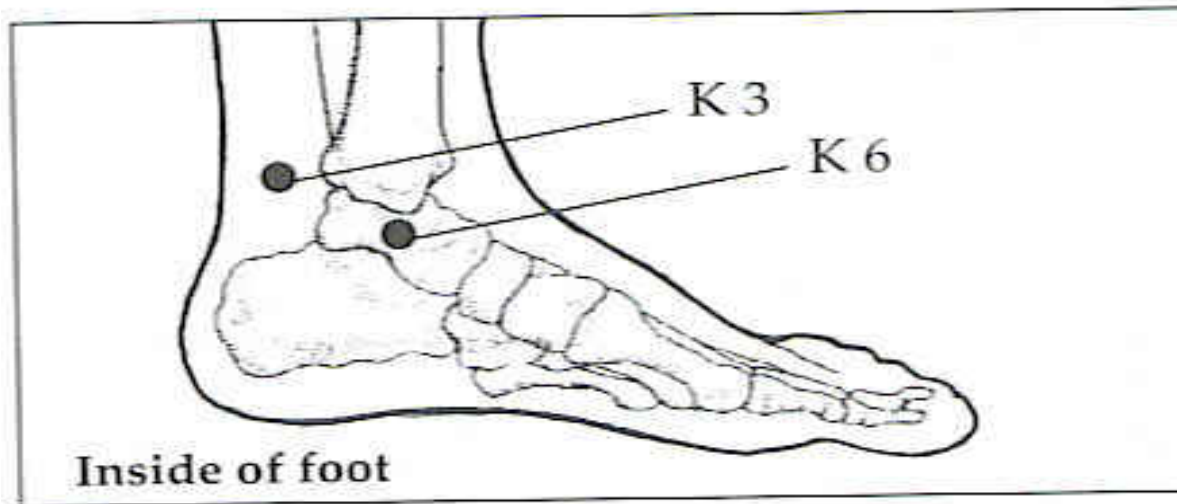
The next step is to address distal points of the spleen, stomach, kidneys and liver on the limbs, as part of a comprehensive mind-body approach to create an abundant flow of qi which pushes the circulatory system. Through the use of certain key points, often named as “Golden Points” by some Master acupuncturists in ancient China (gold, because of their high value in healing), a cluster of issues are successfully addressed (Yu-Hui-Chan and Han – Fu – Ru – Golden Needle Wang Le Ting – Blue Poppy Press, Boulder, Co. – 1983). First, excessive emotions like anger, fear, worry, sadness and hysteria are balanced. Over time, these have become toxic in that they have become deeply embedded in the psychological make-up of the patient.





Picture 3: Golden Point, Spleen 6 where the liver, spleen and kidney channels cross. Calms the mind , increases circulation and energy, regulates metabolism .

One only has to read Hans Selye's research on the effects of stress on the human body and mind.



Picture 3: Position of the distal Golden point Kidney 3, for edema , urination, calming of nerves and strengthening of willpower.

Selye , in his theory of General Adaptation Syndrome ( G.A.S) proved that the body had a general response to demands made by stress that was either positive or negative. He proved how the syndrome induced hormonal autonomic responses, which over time , when left unchecked, lead to ulcers, high blood pressure, arteriosclerosis, arthritis, kidney disease and allergic reactions. Such a complex reaction, therefore has to be treated with a set of acupressure points that treat multiple physiological and organ systems. We mentioned earlier the following organ systems in our comprehensive mind-body approach . These organs are again. liver, spleen, stomach and kidneys.

When the emotional functions of these organ are revealed, Hans Selye’s General Adaptation Syndrome and the long-lasting effects of stress on the whole body, makes perfect sense. The liver is in charge of anger; the spleen and stomach (partners in the 24 - hour circadian rhythm of qi ) worry, concern and obsessive thinking, the kidneys fear and fright. When these emotions are excessive stress is generated on multiple organ and physiological systems. A comprehensive mind-body approach is then necessary.

As an experienced therapist, my first question to the patient , after finding out what has brought him or her to my clinic , is: What emotion rules your life or what emotion has lately been taking over your life ? The answer can vary greatly but in TCM, can be principally narrowed down to four main categories : Fear, Anger, Worry, Joy . It is only

when there is an excess or deficiency of them that health issues emerge. The answer to my question can then lead me to a formula of points that address the patient's ailments successfully and economically.



Picture 4: Distal acupressure on Stomach point 36 ( on the tibialis anterior), the Master Point for the digestive system and beneficial for calming and boosting the immune system.

Overall, the guiding goals in selecting all the points are; increasing circulation and lymph flow; detoxifying the lymphatic system and chronic negative emotions ; calming inflammation, both myofascial and organ related and boosting the immune system. A typical distal acupressure formula for Yin edema starts at the feet and legs, all distal to the organs involved in edema and progresses to the hands and arms . Also , by selecting mainly THE , “ Golden



Points”, most of the goals, are included in the benefits of these points. Thus ,in the main, one can select Kidney 1 and Kidney 3 for energizing and centering ; Spleen 6 and Stomach 36 for increased circulation; immune system enhancement ; detoxification and metabolism, Large Intestine 4 for increased calming , strengthening the immune system and anti-inflammation; Urinary Bladder 23 for energizing all the organs, especially the kidneys and bladder, calming and anti- inflammation. The kidneys are of paramount importance, because they provide energy for longevity and are ultimately connected to the well-being of all physiological systems.

When doing acupressure, the following protocol guiding principles apply. If the points are sensitive to the touch, rotate with a finger pad or thumb pad counter-clockwise for a minute or so, or until the sensitivity is diminished substantially. After going through all points from the feet to the arms, then address the same points again , but this time rotate clockwise on the same points to increase energy to the channels and organs after which they are named.

Lastly, the patient’s feet are pumped up and down , while lying prone. This exercise is aimed at contracting and stretching the soleus muscle mainly, because compared to other lower extremity muscles,it often acts as a second heart pump and provides most intramuscular pressure. According to Simon and Travell,...”Its pumping action increases the venous flow of blood from the feet and legs...” The soleus provides a major pumping action to return, blood from the lower limb toward the heart. “ ( Travell, Janet ; Simon , David – Myofascial Pain and Dysfunction – The Trigger Point Manual: The Lower Extremities ( Pages 429-32 ) – Williams and Wilkins, Baltimore, USA – 1992 ) This prevents venous blood from accumulating over time in the lower limbs from prolonged inactivity.



Picture 5: Pumping the soleus muscle up and down on a sagittal plane for better venous blood return.

Why choose essential oils to aid in the lymphatic flow? Research has established that acupressure and essential oils activate both the central nervous system and endocrine system by releasing hormones like, endorphins, enkephalins, dopamine, serotonin etc.( Advanced Aromatherapy – Schnaubelt, Kurt – Healing Arts Press – Rochester, Vermont - 1995 ). This means that both acupressure and essential oils deepen and lengthen the effect of any manual lymphatic drainage massage done on the skin and fascia by directly affecting physiological systems that aid in getting rid of edema and edematous conditions. Since these physiological systems are directly tapped into, both acupressure and essential oils prolong the effects of manual lymphatic drainage.

Again when choosing essential oils , the therapist should choose on the basis of the guiding goals for choosing acupressure points. These goals are again: Increasing circulation; detoxifying the lymphatic system and the emotions ;boosting the immune system and calming and healing inflammation. Depending on what health issues are most noticeable and alarming, the therapist chooses a variety of oils. Usually, in massage therapy it's inflammation accompanied by pain that gets addressed first.

A good protocol to follow then, would be to use Lavender and Chamomille for the pain and inflammation ; Grapefruit for detoxifying the lymphatic flow; Cypress for increasing general circulation and Peppermint for boosting the immune system . These oils can be applied in layers by using two drops each on the site of the pain after applying a general massage oil first , like Jojoba oil, which can act as a carrier oil . Alternatively , the therapist can mix these oils in a 8 oz. bottle containing Jojoba oil or any other carrier oil. The therapist can either select one each of the previously mentioned oils or several oils of each category. A typical formula would look like this: 14 – 16 drops each of Lavender, Grapefruit, Cypress, Peppermint. On the other hand, if the emphasis is on anti-inflammation and pain control , then the therapist should choose a combination of 14 – 16 drops each of Lavender and Chamomille; 8 – 10 drops of Cypress and Peppermint; 5 – 6 drops of Grapefruit.

The application with the essential oils alone can be one of simply rubbing them on the site of pain and, or the acupressure points by rotating the finger of application counterclockwise with very light pressure for about a minute.

If premixed with a carrier oil, then the therapist again applies the mixture lightly with long stripping strokes starting proximally to the major lymph nodes and then working distally



Picture 6: Lymphatic massage with essential oils towards the two thoracic ducts

In conclusion, because of the complex and chronic issues inherent in patients with lymphatic disorders, a multi-level approach consisting of aromatherapy, acupressure and manual lymphatic drainage, is necessary for successfully treating the patient holistically.



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