



Lymphatic Massage

Keeping the Flow by Gina Rogers, LMT, CMLDT

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What is lymphatic massage?

- Lymphatic Massage is aka manual lymph drainage (MLD).
- Developed first in France in 1932 by Danish physiotherapist Dr. Emil Vodder.
- Since 1932 MLD has been widely researched and used in Europe.
- Migrated to the United States over the last thirty years.
- In this country, we hear most about MLD in the treatment of lymphedema, but has so many more applications.



Manual lymph drainage (MLD) is:

- A light touch manual therapy technique using different gentle and slow hand movements.
- Assists the lymphatic system function by promoting **lymphangiomotoricity**.
- Lymph fluid usually flows at a rate of 10-12 bpm. Unlike the cardiac system, the lymphatic system does not have a pump, it relies on muscle movement, manual lymph drainage, or hydrostatic pressure.
- Following an hour long lymphatic massage, the flow rate will be approximately 100 to 120 bpm, and will gradually slow over the proceeding 48 hours.

The lymphatic system

- Made up of an extensive network of:
 - vessels
 - glands
 - ducts
 - nodes
 - passes through almost all of the tissue in the human body, including the brain.
- Allows for the collection and transport of lymph fluid.
- Lymph fluid is made up of a variety of substances.
 - proteins, fats, salts, glucose, water, cellular debris, and white blood cells.

The body's sewer system

- Absorbs excess interstitial fluid, hormones, and cellular waste.
- Breaks down proteins and other cellular debris that are too big for the cardiac system to break down.
- Lymph nodes contain lymphocytes and phagocytes to break down those proteins, pathogens and other cellular waste.
- “Clean” lymph fluid is transported back through lymph ducts to the veins.
- Once lymph fluid is in our veins it's called plasma.

This is an important system!

Things that will slow the lymphatic system:

- Fighting off an infection, bacterial or viral.
- Primary and secondary lymphedema
- Surgery
- Traumatic event
- Pregnancy
- Lifestyle
 - Sedentary vs active
 - Lymphatic system relies on muscle movement for lymph flow. The less muscle movement, the slower the system.
 - Sitting for long stretches of time causes muscle stiffness, and impedes the thoracic duct.
 - Standing in one place for long periods of time will cause fluid to pool in the lower extremities.
 - Diet
 - High in sugar
 - High in protein
 - High in fat
 - Heavy coffee drinkers-grounds are broken down by lymph system
 - Dehydration- Not providing the body with enough fluid

Sluggish lymph system results in

- Edema
 - Just like when a septic system gets clogged, the fluid has no where to go and ends up building up, just hanging around waiting. Sitting upon muscles and nerves, causing stiffness and pain.
- Adhesions and scar tissue
 - Eventually this protein rich fluid begins to harden creating adhesions and fibrotic tissue within and around organs and muscles. Creating pain, dysfunction, and restricted range of motion.
- Illness
 - Flow is stagnating so its not getting through the lymph nodes where the pathogens would be taken care of, allowing them to get into the surrounding cells. Literally breeding disease.
 - Protein rich fluid that is turning rancid will cause inflammation.

Contraindications for MLD

- Major organ failure/ Cardiac Decompensation
- Hypotension
- Fever/acute inflammation
- Influenza
- Deep vein thrombosis within two years
- Blood thinners (depends on integrity of the skin)
- Conditions of chronic inflammation need to be approached cautiously.
- Infection/ must be on antibiotics for at least 48 hours.
- Recent asthma attack
- First trimester of pregnancy
- Any trimester of pregnancy when still experiencing morning sickness
- Dental infection
- Those undergoing active oncology treatments would need permission from their treatment team.

Some conditions that have been proven to benefit from MLD:

- Lymphedema- *best to see a complete decongestive therapist for treatment phase.*
- Lipodema
- Post surgery swelling
- Lyme disease*
- Chronic sinusitis
- Stroke
- Head injuries/Concussions
- Parkinson's Disease
- Amputation/Phantom pains
- Burns
- Fractures
- Constipation
- Swelling during pregnancy
- Whiplash syndrome
- Dupuytren's contracture
- Bursitis
- Tendinitis, tendinous, Periarthritic syndrome, tendosynovitis, epicondylitis.
- Scleroderma
- Lupus Erythematosis
- Gout in subacute or chronic phase
- Spondylosis
- PTSD
- Cystic Fibrosis
- Diverticulosis
- Acne/Rosacea
- Alzheimer's Disease

More details on diseases MLD can be used to treat can be found in:

MLD has been used in Europe since 1932, this book is a culmination of that experience, research, and practical application.



A lymphatic massage session:

- Similar to regular massage clients are draped on a massage table.
- Oil may be used if clients skin is especially taut, but only in a small amount. Usually no lotions or oils are used.
- 15- to 60- minutes in length.
- Prenatal clients in their second and third trimester start with 15 minute sessions.
- Frequency of lymphatic work can be daily for some conditions and up to every 2 or 3 months for someone healthier and without medical conditions.
- Clients remove all constrictive clothing and/or bandaging, unless not cleared to do so by their physician.
- Clients who are seeking lymphatic massage for edema will be measured before a session, and some will be remeasured after the session, depending on session goals.
- Clients who are receiving five series lymphatic massage will be measured prior to the first session, and proceeding the last session in the series.

Possible side effects of MLD

- Increased relaxation
- Increase in urination
- Possible Diarrhea
- Fatigue
- Possible nausea
- Dizziness when first sitting up.
- Decreased edema
- Increase in energy

Impediment to treatment compliance

Scheduling- For MLD to be the most effective for some treatments clients need to be seen daily for a certain number of weeks. This can be difficult for both a clients schedule or a therapists schedule.

Financial- Lymphatic treatments in the state of Michigan range in price from \$70 to \$160 an hour. While OT's, PT's, MD's, and RN's can usually charge insurance companies directly, it's rare to find those licensed individuals who can do an hour in their schedule every day, and there still may be a copay. For MT's, most insurance companies will not let us bill directly, and while some may reimburse the client, it's still an expensive initial investment.

Lyme Disease Case Study

43 year old woman

- Lyme disease diagnosed one year prior resulting in patient being completely disabled.
- Currently diagnosed with CD2 Deficiency
- Environmental allergies
- Thrombophilia
- “Brain fog”
- Vertigo
- Fatigue
- Depression

Four sessions were done consecutively, four days in a row.

Each session was an hour long.

Sessions were done completely supine, with client semi reclined due to severe vertigo.

Focus was given to head and neck nodes due to the severity of vertigo client was experiencing.

Prior to first session the client filled out a questionnaire answering what symptoms she was experiencing at that time, and the degree of severity. Client rated symptoms from mildly impacting (rated as a 1) her life on that day, moderately impacting her life (rated as a 2), to severely impacting her life (rated as a 3).

Prior to first session:

- 1-Sleep impairment
- 1-Neuropathy
- 1-Headaches
- 1-Heart issues
- 1-Joint pain
- 2-Muscle aches
- 3-Fatigue
- 3-Depression
- 3-Cognitive impairment
- 3-Vertigo

Following fourth session:

- 1-Sleep impairment
- 0-Neuropathy
- 0-Headache
- 0-Heart issue
- 0-Joint pain
- 0-Muscle aches
- 1-Fatigue
- 3-Depression
- 1-Cognitive impairment
- 3-Vertigo

Conclusion

- The lymphatic system is important to a person's overall health.
- Lymphatic massage can be both a positive main therapy or adjunct therapy for many conditions.
- Medical professionals are important for identifying patients that will potentially benefit from this modality.
- Talk about this modality to everyone! The more people know about it's benefits, the more we can bring this needed service to those who will most benefit from it.

Self lymphatic massage for the head and neck:

1. Lightly place both hands along the sides of the neck, under the jaw.



2. Lightly push the skin posteriorly.

3. After pushing the skin towards the posterior neck, in one motion then push the skin downwards, inferiorly, like you're drawing the letter "C". At the end of the "C" let go.



4. At the end of the "C" let go before starting the next repetition.

5. Do seven to twelve repetitions.

You will know you had the correct amount of pressure if the skin bounces back. If the skin does not bounce back, try the next one with less pressure.



1. Hold your hands up so that your second and third fingers form a “V”.



2. Place the “V” of your fingers, lightly, posteriorly and anteriorly, on both sides of your earlobe.



3. Slowly and gently, just engaging the skin, pull your fingers down towards your chin.

4. Without letting go, rotated your fingers upward and your palm down.

5. At the end of the movement remember to let go before going to the next repetition.

Do seven to twelve repetitions.



1. Place your fingers lightly along each side of your mouth, starting at the corner of your nose.



2. Lightly, pull the skin into little half circles, going away from the mouth from the end of your nose to your jawline.

Letting go of the skin after each half circle.

From nose to jaw is one repetition. Do five to twelve repetitions.

End with doing seven to twelve more repetitions on the neck. Making sure to let go of the skin after each repetition.



**Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to learn more
about lymphatic massage.**

If you have any questions please feel free to call or email me at the following contact information:

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