

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

The miracle is not to fly in the air, or to walk on the water, but to walk on the earth.

-Chinese Proverb



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.

Is the Season Getting You Down?

Shine the Light on Winter Blues

In northern climates when the heavy snows fall and the sun moves south, many people find their moods shift from upbeat to downright depressed. The severe form of winter depression--called seasonal affective disorder, or SAD--affects at least two million North Americans. Another thirty-nine million experience milder symptoms of moodiness and extended sleep patterns that somewhat resemble hibernation.

Overeating, sleeping for prolonged periods, mood swings, carbohydrate cravings, and weight gain during winter months may be more than just symptoms of cabin fever. They can suggest a biochemical reaction caused by a lack of exposure to sunlight.

Like all living things, we humans are sensitive to the seasons and sunlight. We secrete a hormone called melatonin, which helps us sleep at night and stay awake during the day. Melatonin production is directly linked to sun exposure. So, as the days get shorter

during the winter, our bodies produce more and more melatonin and we can literally feel like going into a cave and hibernating.

Many SAD sufferers manage their seasonal depression with daily exposure to full-spectrum lamps or light boxes. By getting daily doses of natural light, they can fool their brains into thinking it's summertime, and their need to sleep decreases.

Recent research shows that timing these light therapy sessions to our natural biological clocks is even more beneficial than usage during the day. Exposure to natural spectrum bright light for thirty minutes on awakening is twice as effective as evening sessions, and one study found this practice actually had an 80 percent chance of sending SAD into remission.

If winter blues are getting to you, consider investing in a full spectrum lamp and use it first thing in the morning--because SAD is for the bears.



Loosen the grip of seasonal affective disorder.

Probiotics for Skin Health

Trust Your Gut on This One!

Shelley Burns, N.D.

Digestive health plays an important role in how skin appears on the surface. When digestion is not working optimally, it allows toxins to be reabsorbed in the body instead of being eliminated. The body then mounts a state of emergency as it's overwhelmed by toxins, some of them bad bacteria. These manifest directly on the surface for all the world to see, in the form of wrinkles, blotchiness, skin rashes, and acne.

This is where probiotics come into play. Probiotics contain potentially beneficial bacteria found in the digestive tract--what some call good gut bacteria. They help strengthen the digestive system but they also play an important role in skin health. Probiotics consist of

Lactobacillus acidophilus, *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*, and *Bifidobacterium bifidum*. They have anti-inflammatory, anti-pathogenic, and antiallergenic properties and can be used prophylactically and therapeutically.

There have been many studies showing benefits of probiotics to skin health. For example, there's a correlation between an imbalance of good and bad bacteria and the onset of acne. When bringing natural bacteria back into balance with a probiotic intervention, acne improves, in some studies, as much as 50 percent of the time.

There is no recommended daily intake for probiotics, but good food sources include buttermilk, kefir, miso,

tempeh, yogurt, and other fermented foods. Supplements are generally higher in potency and are used for therapeutic purposes in treating irritable bowel syndrome, Crohn's disease, colitis, and many other conditions.

While probiotics are essential for healthy skin and digestive health, there are many other appealing benefits to encourage their use, such as strengthening the immune system, replacing good bacteria after a course of antibiotics, and contributing to general health and well-being.

One note: Some probiotic supplements come from dairy sources and may not be suitable for individuals with dairy allergies or sensitivities.

*I know what
things are good:
friendship and
work and
conversation.
These I shall
have.*

-Rupert Brooke

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