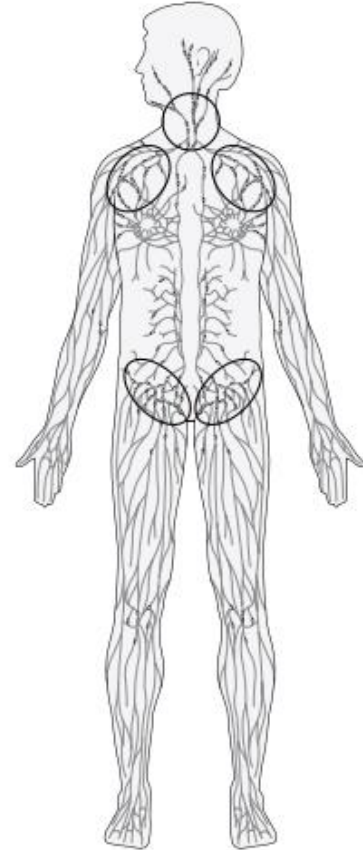




Lymphatic Self-Massage for Lower Body¹

What is the lymphatic system?

Your lymphatic system collects and filters fluid from your body and returns it to your blood stream. The lymphatic system plays an important role in your immune function. It is made up of lymph nodes that are connected by lymph vessels. Large groups or chains of lymph nodes can be found in your neck, under your arms and in your groin (see picture to the right). When fluid does not flow properly, it causes a chronic swelling called lymphedema.



How does self-massage help with lymphedema?

Manual Lymph Drainage, or MLD, is a gentle skin massage that helps move extra fluid from an area that is swollen (or is at risk of becoming swollen), into an area where the lymph nodes are working properly. This is done by stimulating contractions of lymphatic vessels.

If you have swelling in your abdomen, groin, hip(s), genital area and leg(s), you will be moving fluid away from where you have swelling. These areas can include:

- affected leg(s) and hip(s)
- abdomen (pelvic area)
- groin
- genital area

Extra fluid can be moved to your:

- underarm(s)
- unaffected groin

¹ The following has been adapted from the University Health Network Patient Education resource *How to Do Lymphatic Self-Massage on Your Lower Body* (Form: D-5802) and *Active Self Lymphatic Drainage for the Lower Extremity* by Dorit Tidhar

Instructions for doing self-massage

- Use a light pressure and keep your hands soft and relaxed. Use just enough pressure to gently stretch the skin as far as it naturally goes and then release the pressure. Let your skin come back as it was. If you can feel your muscles underneath your fingers, then you are pressing too hard.
- Use the flats of your hands instead of your fingertips. This allows more contact with the skin to stimulate the lymph vessels.
- Massage towards areas of your body that have not been treated for cancer.
- Make sure you are comfortable while doing the massage. You can try a seated, standing or lying down position.
- Try to do self-massage every day.
- **If you need to do the massage on both sides of your body, start on one side of your body and go through each step. Once you have completed the steps on one side, repeat them on the other side of your body.**

What to avoid

- Do not strain your shoulders, neck, arm or hand.
- Do not self-massage in a way that causes pain.
- Do not continue self-massage if it is causing you pain.
- Do not self-massage if you have an infection in that area

Important: Do NOT do self-massage if you have an infection in your abdomen, leg(s) or feet. Signs of infection may include:

- swelling in these areas and redness of the skin (this redness can quickly spread)
- feeling pain in your leg(s) or feet
- feeling tenderness and/or warmth in one or both legs or feet
- having a fever or chills and feeling unwell

If you have an infection or think you have an infection, go to your:

- family doctor
- walk-in clinic
- hospital emergency department

1. Deep chest breathing

A very important part of your self-care is deep breathing. Deep breathing helps to stimulate lymphatic system in your whole body. You can practice deep breathing anytime!

- Place the palms/flats of your hands on your chest.
- Slowly, breathe in deeply through your nose, and let your stomach expand.
- Breathe out slowly through pursed lips (as if you were about to blow out a candle), and let your stomach flatten.
- Repeat 5 times. Take a short rest between each breath so you do not get dizzy

2. Deep abdominal breathing

- Place the palms/flats of your hands on your stomach.
- Slowly, breathe in deeply through your nose, and let your stomach expand.
- Breathe out slowly through pursed lips (as if you were about to blow out a candle), and let your stomach flatten.
- Repeat 5 times. Take a short rest between each breath so you do not get dizzy



3. Prepare your chest

This step prepares the lymph nodes in your under arm to take in lymph fluid from your affected abdomen and upper leg.

Place your arm in a comfortable position. Keep it slightly raised and supported.

- Place your palm against your underarm on the side of your body that has lymphedema.
- Gently pull up and in toward your body, then release.
- Repeat 10 to 15 times

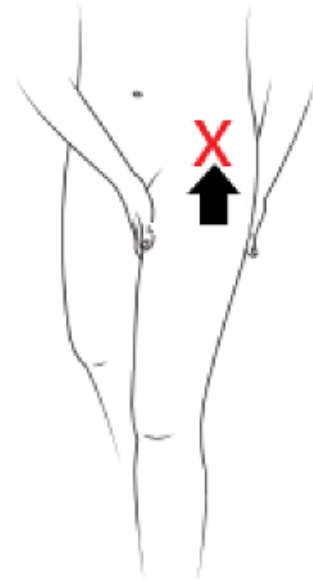


4. Prepare your legs

This step prepares the lymph nodes in the crease of your legs to take in lymph fluid from your affected leg and foot.

Place your leg in a comfortable and supported position.

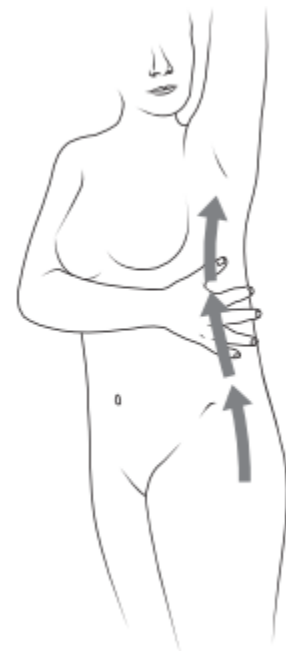
- Place your palm against the crease at the top of your leg on the side of your body that has lymphedema.
- Gently pull up and in toward your body, then release.
- Repeat 10 to 15 times



5. Stretch and release the skin from your hip to your underarm

Do this step on the side of your body that has lymphedema. This step will direct fluid away from your hip to your underarm.

- Place your hand on your hip on the side that has lymphedema.
- Gently massage from the outside of your hip (beside your hip bone) using several small strokes. Massage upward along the side of your body to your underarm.
- Gently stretch the skin as far as it goes naturally and release.
- Repeat 10 to 15 times



Positioning before starting leg massage

Try these leg positions to avoid low back strain:

- Place your foot on a low stool.
- Put your ankle on your knee.
- Place your foot on a higher stool.
-

Use a pillow for support if needed. Do not strain your back, wrists or hands. Change your position as needed

6. Stretch and release the skin on your outside of leg

Fluid normally flows up the inside of your leg into the lymph nodes in your groin. This step directs fluid away from the inside of your leg to the side of your leg and up the side of your body into your underarm.

When doing this massage, make sure you are comfortable. Do not strain your back, wrists or hands. You can also add deep breathing to make the massage even more effective.

- Place your hand on the outside of your knee. Switching between your left and right hands, stretch the skin in an upward motion towards your underarm.
- Repeat 10 to 15 times



7. Prepare your knee

This step will prepare the lymph nodes in the back of your knee to take in fluid.

- Place your hands behind your knee
- Gently pump the back of your knee in a rolling, upward motion (making a “J” shape).
- Repeat 10 to 15 times



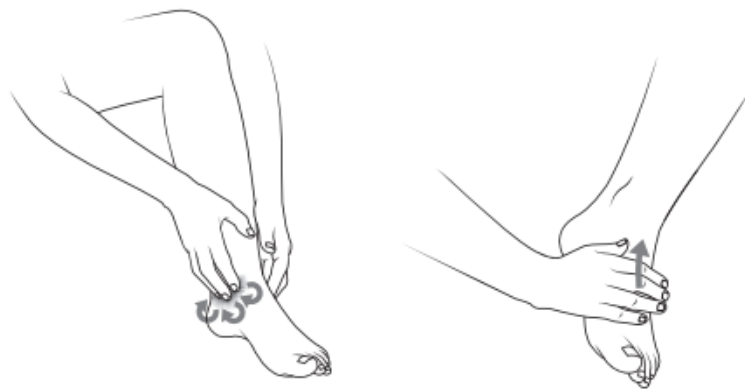
8. Stretch and release the skin on your lower leg

- Place one hand on your shin and the other hand on the back of your lower leg, just below your knee.
- Gently stretch the skin towards your upper leg and release.
- Shift your hands down and repeat this upward motion until you reach your ankle.
- Remember to stretch and release the skin up towards your knee.
- Repeat 10 to 15 times



9. Stretch and release the skin on your ankle and foot

- Continue the stroke from the previous step on your ankle and foot.
- Remember to gently stretch the skin as far as it goes naturally.
- Always stroke up



10. Massage for swollen toes

Do the following step if your toes are swollen.

- Place your index finger and thumb on the base of your toe.
- Gently push the fluid towards your foot.
- Repeat often



11. Squeeze underarm lymph nodes

This step will clear the lymph nodes of lymph fluid accumulated through massage

Place your arm in a comfortable position. Keep it slightly raised and supported.

- Place your palm against your underarm on the side of your body that has lymphedema.
- Gently pull up and in toward your body, then release.
- Repeat 10 to 15 times

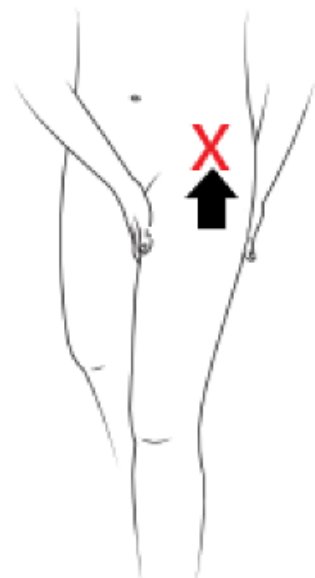


12. Squeeze lymph nodes in the crease of legs

This step prepares the lymph nodes in the crease of your legs to take in lymph fluid from your affected leg and foot.

Place your leg in a comfortable and supported position.

- Place your palm against the crease at the top of your leg on the side of your body that has lymphedema.
- Gently pull up and in toward your body, then release.
- Repeat 10 to 15 times



13. Deep abdominal breathing

- Place the palms/flats of your hands on your stomach.
- Slowly, breathe in deeply through your nose, and let your stomach expand.
- Breathe out slowly through pursed lips (as if you were about to blow out a candle), and let your stomach flatten.
- Repeat 5 times. Take a short rest between each breath so you do not get dizzy



14. Deep chest breathing

A very important part of your self-care is deep breathing. Deep breathing helps to stimulate lymphatic system in your whole body. You can practice deep breathing anytime!

- Place the palms/flats of your hands on your chest.
- Slowly, breathe in deeply through your nose, and let your stomach expand.
- Breathe out slowly through pursed lips (as if you were about to blow out a candle), and let your stomach flatten.
- Repeat 5 times. Take a short rest between each breath so you do not get dizzy