

Self-massage for upper-extremity lymphedema

Self-massage is beneficial for women who have, or want to prevent, lymphedema. By redirecting fluids to other areas of your body, massage can help reduce or prevent swelling caused by lymphedema.

Once you become familiar with this technique, it only takes 5 to 10 minutes to do.

Massage should be done on bare skin. Some women like to do it in the shower. It can be done anytime of the day. For best results, do it daily.

Step 1:

Abdominal breathing exercises

This little jumpstart for the lymphatics deep inside your belly helps prepare your system to handle the fluid you will move with massage.

- Sit with your hands on your stomach
- Inhale deeply through your nose while expanding your stomach
- Blow out hard through your mouth while pushing your stomach in with both hands
- Repeat 3 times

If you don't have back problems, combine this deep breathing exercise with these strong abdominal muscle contractions:

- Lie on your back on the floor or bed
- Bend your knees and put your feet flat on the floor
- Put your hands on your thighs
- Inhale deeply through your nose while expanding your stomach
- Blow out hard through your mouth while doing a small sit-up, sliding your hands up toward your knees
- Repeat 3 times

This exercise combines a forceful exhale with a contraction of your stomach muscles which improves overall circulation and lymphatic flow.

Step 2:

Clear your neck lymph nodes

- Feel for the hollow spots above your collarbones (close to throat)
- Using your first few fingertips, gently stroke straight down into the hollow, as if you are trying to move fluid behind the collarbone. It may feel more comfortable to cross your hand over your throat to do this movement.
- Repeat 10 times

IMPORTANT: If you have a port on one side, do not massage that side of the neck.

Step 3:

Clear your armpit lymph nodes

- Do the affected side first
 - Massage deep into the armpit toward your trunk, lifting your hand up and in toward your body
 - Repeat 10 times on each side
- To get into the armpit better,** raise your arm or support your arm against a wall.

Step 4:

First pathway - CHEST: Draining lymph channels from your affected arm towards the opposite armpit.

Step 4-A:

- Using short strokes and your entire flat hand, stroke across your upper chest, just below your collarbone
- Move from your affected side to the opposite side
- About halfway across, you might find it easier to change hands, switching from a pulling to a pushing motion
- Repeat 5 times

Step 4-B:

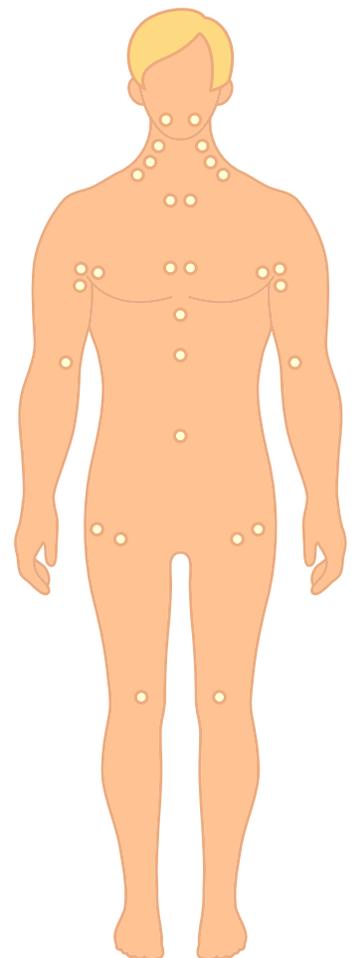
- Repeat Step 4-A, except move your hand position down, just above your breasts
- Repeat 5 times

Step 4-C:

- Repeat Step 4-B, except move your hand position down again, across your breasts
- Repeat 5 time

It can be hard to move fluid across scar tissue. If you have a lot of scar tissue, it helps to spend more time massaging across that tissue.

LYMPH NODES



Step 5:

Repeat steps 2 and 3. (Clear lymph nodes above collarbones and in armpits.)

Step 6:

Second pathway – TRUNK: Draining lymph channels from your affected armpit toward the groin on the same side.

Step 6-A: Clear the groin lymph nodes on your affected side

- Your groin nodes are located where your leg attaches to your torso, under your panty line
- Using one hand on top of the other, stroke from just below the panty line, across the upper thigh towards your belly button. Use a scooping motion—in and up
- Repeat 10 times

Step 6-B: Drain the abdomen lymph channels on your affected side

- Using short strokes with both hands flat on your abdomen, stroke down toward the groin nodes
- End these strokes just above the panty line
- Repeat 5 times

Step 6-C: Drain the waist lymph channels on your affected side

- Stroke from around the back of your waist toward the groin nodes on the same side
- End these strokes just above the panty line
- Repeat 5 times

If you have trouble reaching your back, use a towel or long-handled bath brush with a towel wrapped around the bristles to massage.

Step 6-D: Drain the lymph channels from armpit to groin nodes

- Using short strokes, start at the armpit and work down to the groin nodes
- End these strokes just above the panty line
- Repeat 5 times (or more if this is a swollen area)

Step 6-E: Repeat steps 2, 3, and 6-A. (Clear lymph nodes at collarbones, armpits and groin)

Step 7:

Third pathway – ARM: Draining arm lymph channels on your affected side past the shoulder toward the neck

Step 7-A: Stroke the back of your affected shoulder up and over toward your neck lymph nodes

- Repeat 5 times

If you have trouble reaching your back, use a long-handled bath brush with a towel wrapped around the bristles to massage

Step 7-B: Stroke the outside of your upper arm up toward the back of the shoulder, then up toward your neck lymph nodes

- Repeat 5 times

Step 7-C: Stroke the inside of your upper arm, up toward the back of your shoulder. Do not stroke toward your armpit, but sweep your hand from inner arm, toward the back of your arm and up the back of your shoulder

- Do either with your arm at your side, using the back of your hand, or raise your arm and stroke down toward the shoulder
- Repeat 5 times

Step 7-D: Stroke the front of your upper arm up toward the back of your shoulder toward the neck nodes

- Repeat 5 times

Step 7-E: Repeat steps 2, 3 and 6-A. (Clear lymph nodes at collarbones, armpits and groin.)

Step 7-F: Stroke the lymph nodes just above and below the bone on the inside of your elbow (the “funny bone”).

- Use your thumb to stroke upward, 5 times just above the elbow bone, 5 times just below elbow bone

Step 7-G: With your palm up on your affected side, stroke your forearm from wrist to elbow

- Repeat 5 times (or more if there is swelling in the area)

Step 7-H: Gently stroke the back of your hand toward the wrist

- Repeat 5 times

Step 7-I: Massage the backs and sides of each finger, from nails to the hand

Step 7-J: Do a general sweeping motion from hands up the entire arm

- Clear the elbow nodes on your way up
- Move fluid toward the back of your shoulder and up toward your neck nodes

Step 7-K: Repeat steps 2, 3 and 6-A. (Clear lymph nodes at collarbones, armpits and groin.)

You're done! If time permits:

- Repeat Step 1 breathing exercises
- Lie down with your affected arm elevated on a pillow 5-10 minutes, occasionally opening and closing your hand

For more information,
call your therapist at
the Mercy Sports
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(608) 755-7880.

