

Manual Lymph Drainage for the Upper Body

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Table of Contents

Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD) for the Upper Body.....4

How to do Manual Lymph Drainage.....6

Neck and Shoulder.....7

Underarm and Chest.....8

Groin and Stomach.....9

Arm and Hand.....10

Breast.....12

Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD) for the Upper Body

This book was created to help guide you in your lymphedema treatment plan. Your plan may include other treatments along with manual lymph drainage (MLD). Your therapist will create a plan with you. If you have any questions or concerns, please talk with your therapist.

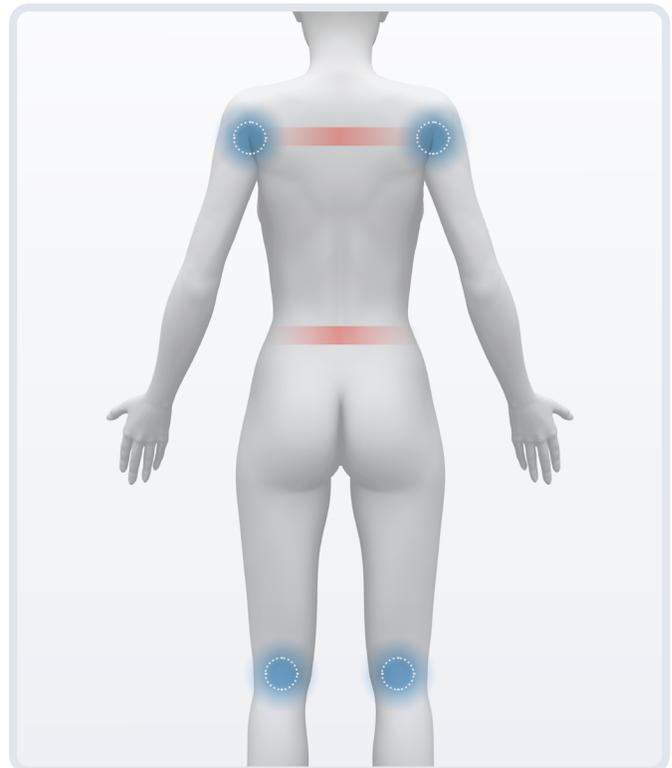
Therapist Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

What is the Lymph System?

The lymph system is a network of lymph vessels, tissues, and organs that carry lymph throughout the body. The parts of the lymph system that lay a direct part in lymphedema include the following:

- **Lymph:** Colorless, watery fluid that travels through the lymph vessels and carries lymphocytes. Lymphocytes are a type of white blood cell.
- **Lymph vessels:** A network of thin tubes that collect lymph from different parts of the body and return it to the bloodstream.
- **Lymph nodes:** Small, bean shaped structures that filter lymph and store white blood cells that help fight infection and disease. Lymph nodes are found along a network of lymph vessels throughout the body. Groups of lymph nodes are found in the neck, underarm, groin, and other areas.



What is Lymphedema?

Lymphedema is the buildup of protein rich fluid the body cannot absorb which can cause swelling. When the lymph system is working as it should, lymph flows through the body and is returned to the bloodstream.

When part of the lymph system is damaged or blocked, fluid cannot drain from nearby body tissues. Fluid builds up in the tissues and causes swelling. The swelling is lymphedema.

What is Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD)?

To help understand the process, think of a traffic jam. The fluid needs to change direction to help with the flow. You will work your way back towards the jam to get the fluid to move. Once the traffic jam is removed, the fluid can move back into the blood stream.

You will learn how to stretch and move your skin in a way that helps the lymph fluid drain away from the swollen areas. Moving the lymph fluid towards an unaffected (undamaged) area allows it to reabsorb into your blood stream in another part of your body.

For example, if your underarm lymph nodes were affected by breast cancer treatment, you will notice swelling in your affected arm, breast, or chest wall. You can use MLD to move the fluid towards the lymph nodes in your other arm, neck, or groin.

Terms to know:

- Affected: The side that had treatment, surgery, or has swelling.
- Unaffected: The side that did not have treatment, surgery, or has swelling.

If you have questions about which is the affected and unaffected side, please ask your therapist. The directions in this book will have you place your fingers or hand on the affected side or unaffected side in the steps.

When to Do MLD

You can do MLD every day. MLD can be done while you are sitting, standing, or lying down. Some ways you can add MLD to your daily routines:

- While watching TV
- As part of a relaxation routine before bed
- During your meditation or prayer
- Time during self-care

When Not to Do MLD

Your therapist will review your medical history and talk with your doctor if there are any concerns.

Do not do MLD:

- Directly over an implanted device such as a port or pacemaker
- In an area where it causes pain
- If you have an infection or open skin in that area

Some people have chronic health problems that make it unsafe to do MLD, these include:

- Heart failure
- Liver problems
- History of blood clots or stroke
- Kidney problems

Scars

You may be able to perform lymph drainage over a scar. Your therapist will let you know if you can follow the same path in this book over a scar or if you have to change paths.

How to do Manual Lymph Drainage

Stages of MLD

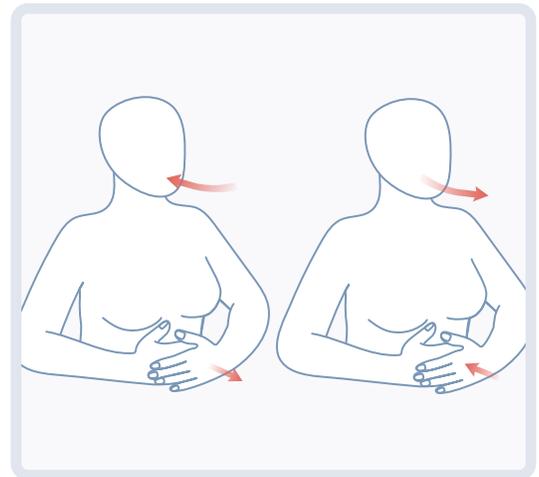
There are 2 stages of MLD. The steps need to be done in the correct order.

- **Draining:** Drain the lymph fluid that is currently in the lymph vessels and nodes to make room for more fluid.
- **Moving:** Move the fluid in the tissues (seen as swelling) to the area of the body where the lymph is better flowing.

Deep Breathing

Before you start, you need to do deep breathing exercises. This is important to help the lymph flow. You can do this anytime and anywhere.

1. Sit up straight in a chair or lie down with your knees bent.
2. Place your hands flat on your belly.
3. Breath out normally.
4. Breath in deeply and slowly through your nose. You should feel your belly and chest expand.
5. Pucker your lips and breathe out through your mouth. You should feel your belly flatten and your chest go down.
6. Rest for a few seconds before starting the MLD technique.



The Basic MLD Technique

Lymph flows right under your skin. To move the lymph fluid, you need to use gentle, light pressure to stretch the skin. Firm and deep pressure like a massage does not work which will block the flow of fluid. The stretch and release movements should become a rhythmic motion.

1. Keep your hand open and relaxed. You will use the pads of your fingers to gently help the fluid move.
2. Gently stretch the skin as far as it naturally goes in the direction that you want the lymph to flow. Hold for 3 seconds.
3. Then release the pressure and let your skin return to the relaxed state before repeating the movement.
4. You will repeat all these steps 10 times.



Scan the QR code to watch a video on manual lymph drainage.

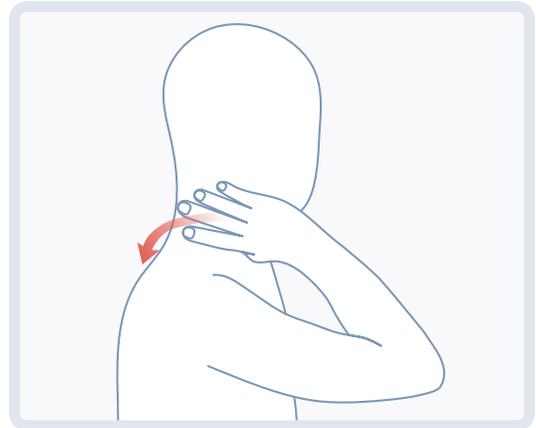
Neck and Shoulder

Drain Your Neck

Using a very light touch and relaxed hand:

1. Place 3 or 4 fingers flatly on one side of your neck, just under your ears.
2. Gently stretch your skin to the back and down. Hold for 3 seconds.
3. Release skin.
4. Start stretching your skin near your ear then move down your neck and repeat. Move down your neck in this way until you reach your shoulder.
5. Repeat all these steps 10 times.

Repeat steps 1 through 4 on the other side. You may be able to do both sides at the same time.

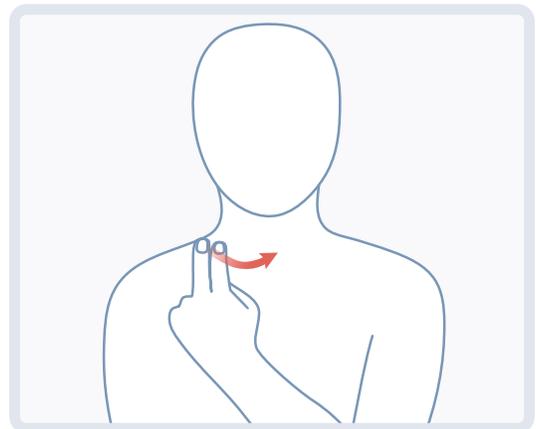


Drain the Top of the Shoulder

Using a very light touch and relaxed hand:

1. Place the pads of 2 or 3 fingers at the side of your neck, just above your collarbone.
2. Gently stretch your skin down and in towards your collarbone while keeping your fingers above your collarbone. Hold for 3 seconds.
3. Release the skin.
4. Repeat all these steps 10 times.

Repeat steps 1 through 4 on the other side.

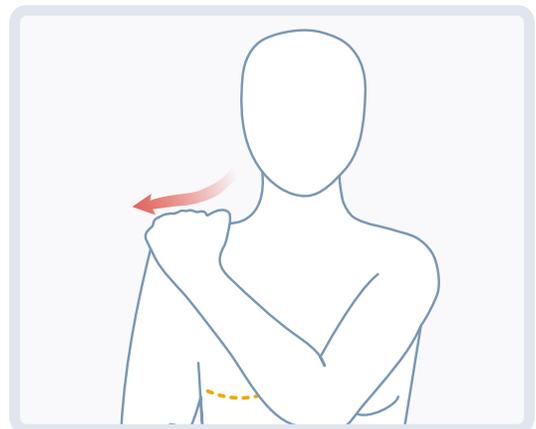


Drain the Shoulder

Using a very light touch and relaxed hand:

1. Place the flat of your hand at the outside of your shoulder on your affected side.
2. Gently stretch your skin away from your neck. Hold for 3 seconds.
3. Release skin.
4. Move your hand closer to your neck and repeat steps 2 and 3.
5. Repeat all these steps 10 times.

If you are able, you can drain the back of your shoulder following the same steps 1 through 5.



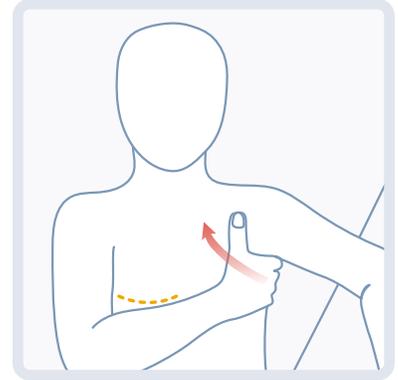
Underarm and Chest

Drain the Unaffected Underarm (Not Procedure or Treatment Side)

Using a very light touch and relaxed hand:

1. Raise your unaffected arm.
2. Place your hand flat against your underarm. Gently pull the skin up and in toward your body. Hold for 3 seconds.
3. Release skin.
4. Move your hand closer to your neck and repeat step 2.
5. Repeat all these steps 10 times.

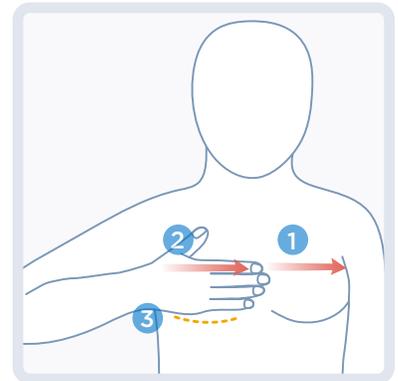
If you are able, you can drain the back of your shoulder following the same steps 1 through 4.



Move Lymph From Upper Chest to Underarm (Armpit)

Using a very light touch and relaxed hand:

1. Place your hand above your unaffected breast, below the collarbone, close to the unaffected underarm.
2. Gently stretch your skin across your chest towards your unaffected underarm (1 on the image). Hold for 3 seconds.
3. Release skin.
4. Move your hand above the affected breast (2 on the image) and repeat steps 2 and 3.
5. Move your hand to the affected underarm (3 on the image) and repeat steps 2 and 3.
6. Repeat all these steps 10 times.

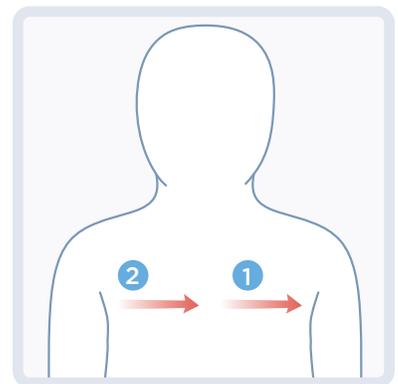


Move Lymph From Upper Chest to Underarm From the Back

If you are unable to use the drainage method on the chest, you can have the same results by having someone help you complete these steps on the back.

Using a very light touch and relaxed hand:

1. Place your hand on your shoulder blade on the unaffected side (1 on the image).
2. Gently stretch your skin across your shoulder blade towards your unaffected underarm. Hold for 3 seconds.
3. Release skin.
4. Move your hand to the affected shoulder blade side (2 on the image) and repeat steps 2 and 3.
5. Move your hand to the affected underarm and repeat steps 2 and 3.
6. Repeat all these steps 10 times.

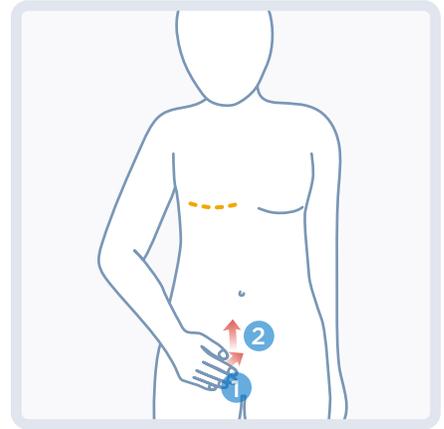


Groin and Stomach

Drain the Groin Area

Do this on the side that was affected. Using a very light touch and relaxed hand:

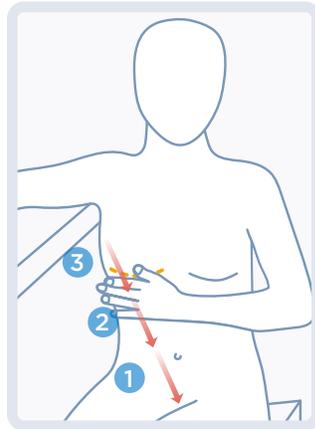
1. Place the flat of your hand along the crease at the top of your leg at your panty line (1 on the image).
2. Gently press into your body using a pumping pressure
3. With gentle pressure and keeping your hand in place, roll your hand from the pinky to the thumb side. Gently scoop upwards. Make the letter J with your hand (2 on the image).
4. Repeat all these steps 10 times.



Stomach to Underarm

Using a very light touch and relaxed hand:

1. Place your flat hand or flattened fingers on the side of the stomach (1 on the image).
2. Gently stretch your skin towards your groin. Hold for 3 seconds.
3. Release skin.
4. Move your hand to your rib (2 on the image) on the same side. Repeat steps 2 and 3.
5. Move your hand to your underarm (3 on the image) on the same side. Repeat steps 2 and 3.
6. Repeat all these steps 10 times.



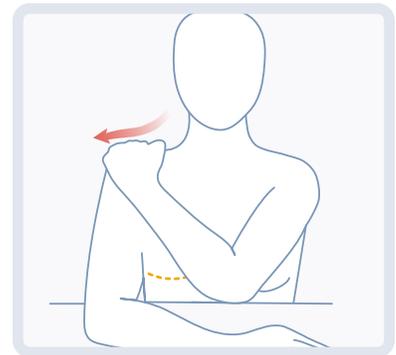
Arm and Hand

In this section you will only drain your affected side.

Drain the Shoulder

Using a very light touch and relaxed hand:

1. Place the flat of your hand on the outside of your shoulder on your affected side.
2. Gently stretch your skin from your neck. Hold for 3 seconds.
3. Release skin.
4. Move your hand closer to your neck and repeat steps 2 and 3.
5. Repeat all these steps 10 times.

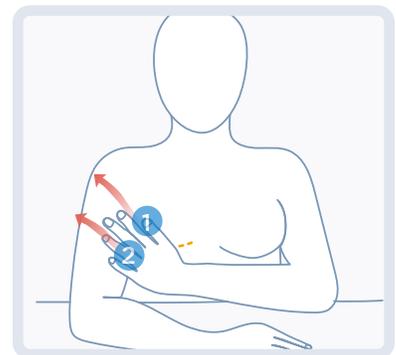


If you are able, drain the back of your shoulder in the same way following the above steps.

Drain the Inside Upper Arm

Using a very light touch and relaxed hand:

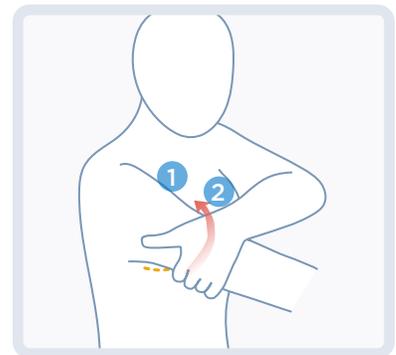
1. Place the flat of your hand inside the top of your arm on your affected side (1 on the image).
2. Gently stretch your skin toward the top of your arm. Hold for 3 seconds.
3. Release skin.
4. Move your hand down (2 on the image) and repeat steps 2 and 3.
5. Repeat all these steps 10 times.



Drain the Back of the Upper Arm

Using a very light touch and relaxed hand:

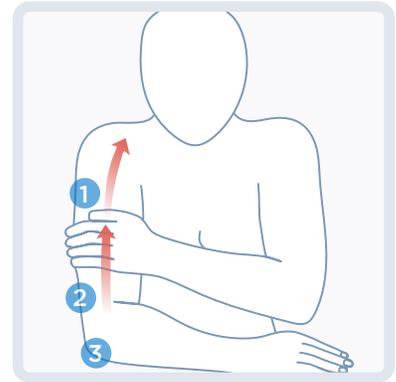
1. Place the flat of your hand on the back of your arm on the affected side (1 on the image).
2. Gently stretch your skin toward the top of your arm. Hold for 3 seconds.
3. Release skin.
4. Move your hand down (2 on the image) and repeat steps 2 and 3.
5. Repeat all these steps 10 times.



Move Lymph from Upper Arm to Shoulder

Using a very light touch and relaxed hand:

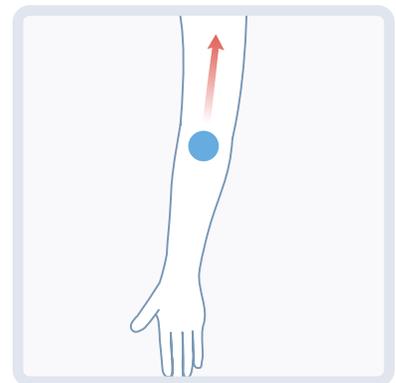
1. On your affected side, place the flat side of your hand (palm) on the front of your arm near your shoulder (1 on the image).
2. Gently stretch your skin toward your shoulder of the same arm. Hold for 3 seconds.
3. Release skin.
4. Move your hand down your upper arm (2 on the image). Repeat steps 2 and 3.
5. Turn your palms up, move your hand to the underside of your elbow (3 on the image). Repeat steps 2 and 3.
6. Repeat all these steps 10 times.



Move Lymph from Inner Elbow to Shoulder

Using a very light touch and relaxed hand:

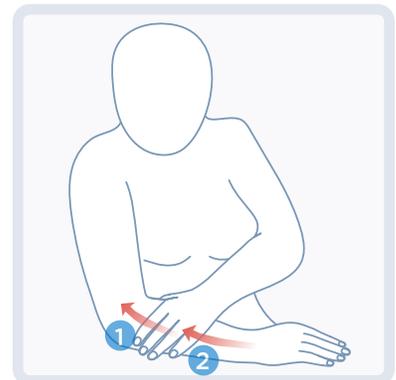
1. Place the pads of 2 or 3 fingers on the inner part of your elbow.
2. Gently stretch your skin towards your shoulder. Hold for 3 seconds.
3. Release skin.
4. Repeat all these steps 10 times.



Move Lymph from Lower Arm to Upper Arm

Using a very light touch and relaxed hand:

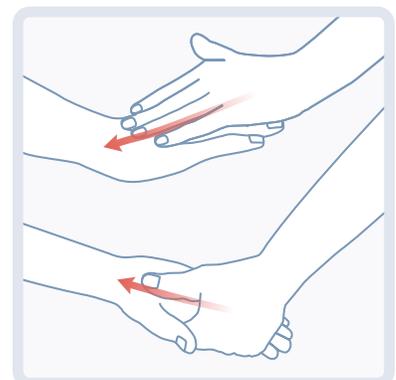
1. Move your hand below your elbow (1 on the image).
2. Gently stretch your skin toward your elbow on the same arm. Hold for 3 seconds.
3. Release skin.
4. Move your hand (2 on the image). Repeat steps 2 and 3.
5. Turn the palm facing up on your arm. Repeat steps 2 and 3.
6. Repeat all these steps 10 times.



Move Lymph from Hand to Lower Arm

Using a very light touch and relaxed hand:

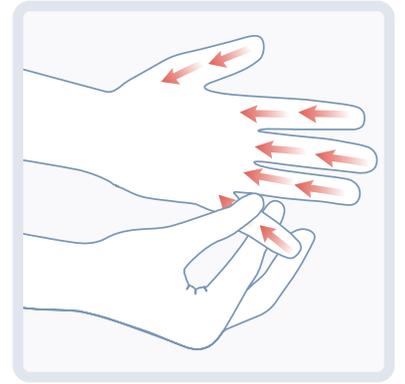
1. Place your fingers on the back of your hand.
2. Gently stretch the skin towards your wrist. Hold for 3 seconds.
3. Release skin.
4. Same hand, place your other thumb between your thumb and first finger (pointer finger). Repeat steps 2 and 3.
5. Repeat all these steps 10 times.



Drain the Fingers

Using a very light touch and relaxed hand:

1. Place your thumb and first finger (pointer finger) at the tip of a finger.
2. Gently stretch the skin toward your hand. Hold for 3 seconds.
3. Release skin.
4. Do steps 1 through 3 on each finger of that same hand.
5. Repeat all these steps 10 times.



Breast

The complete steps to drain the breast will be done above the areola (nipple area), below the areola, and moving lymph from armpit to groin. Please read the full steps on how much to drain each section before moving on to the next area.

Drain the Breast Above Areola

Using a very light touch and relaxed hand:

1. Place the palm of your hand above the areola or mastectomy scar closest to the middle of your chest (sternum, 1 on image).
2. Gently stretch your skin toward your affected underarm. Hold for 3 seconds.
3. Release skin.
4. Move your hand closer to your shoulder area (2 on image) and gently stretch your skin toward your affected underarm. Release skin.
5. Place your hand below the areola or mastectomy scar closest to the middle of your chest (3 on the image). Repeat steps 2 and 3.
6. Place your hand closer to the shoulder area (4 on the image). Repeat steps 2 and 3.
7. Move your hand to the inner arm (5 on image) and gently stretch the skin downward. Release skin.
8. Follow the path on the image for 6 and 7 and stretch the skin downward.
9. Repeat these steps 2 times.

