

# Manual Lymph Drainage of the Head and Neck





# 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 play 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

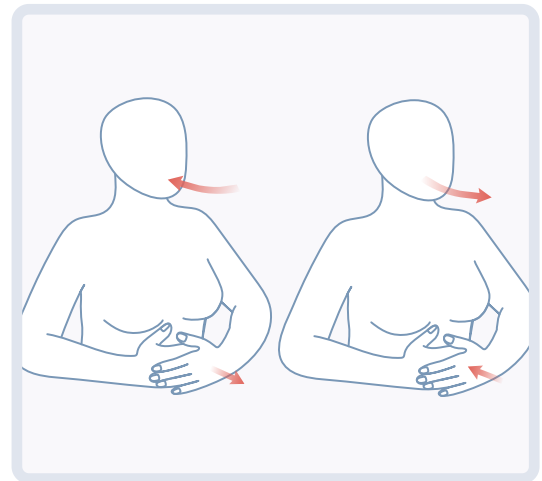
There are 2 stages of MLD. The steps need to be done in the correct order.

- **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. Breathe out normally.
4. Breathe in deeply and slowly through your nose. You should feel your belly and chest expand.
5. Pucker your lips and breathe out slowly through your mouth. You should feel your belly flatten and your chest go down.
  - Your breath out should be twice as long as your breath in.
    - This should take 30 to 60 seconds to complete.
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.

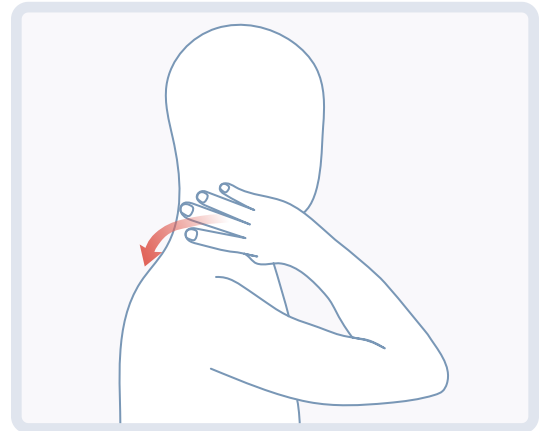
# Neck and Shoulder

## 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.

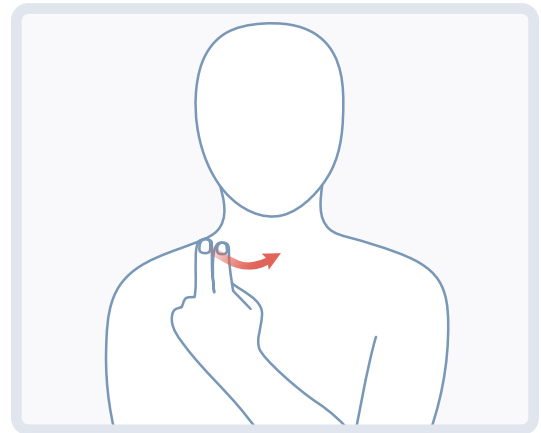


## Drain the Top of the Shoulder

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.

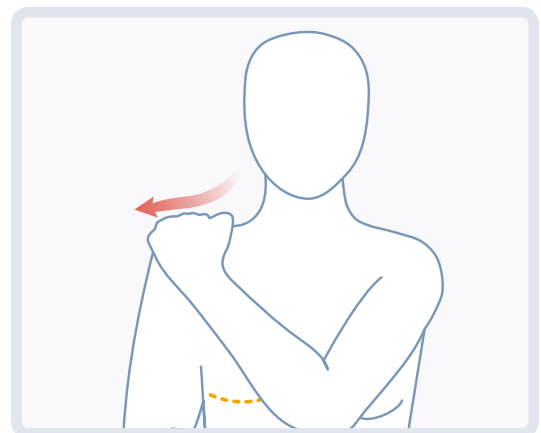
Repeat steps 1 through 4 on the other side.



## 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.

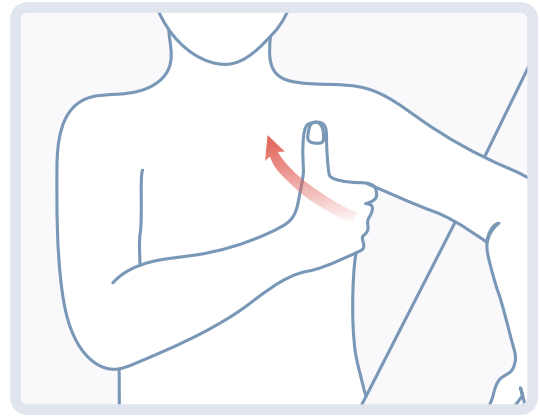


If you are able, you can drain the back of your shoulder following the same steps 1 through 5.

## Drain the Underarm

This is to make room for the lymph nodes in your under arm to take in lymph fluid from your neck area. Do this on the affected side.

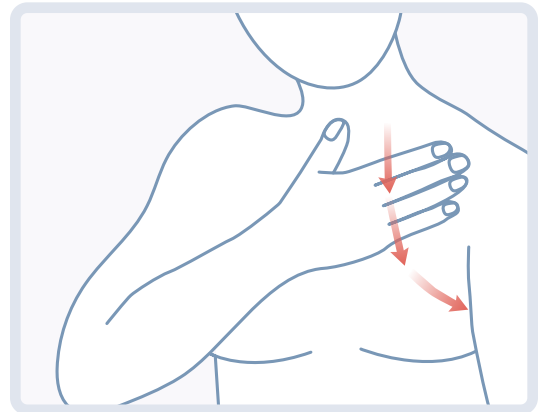
1. Place your arm on an arm rest or table.
2. Place your palm against your underarm.
3. Gently pull up and in toward your body, then release.
4. Repeat 10 times.



## Drain Lymph From Your Neck to Your Underarm

Using a very light touch and relaxed hand:

1. Place your hand on your upper chest, just below your neck.
2. Gently stretch your skin toward your underarm, hold for 3 seconds, then release.
3. Repeat 10 times.



## Drain the Ears

To drain the ear:

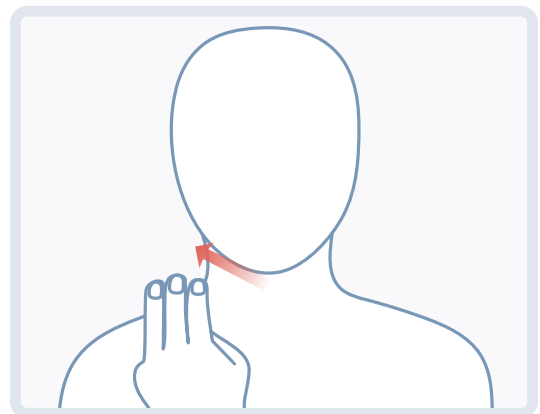
1. Place your pinky and ring finger in front of your ear; the middle and ring finger behind your ear creating a Spock hand.
2. Gently pull the skin in front and behind the ear downward.
3. Repeat 10 times.



## Drain the Jaw

To drain the jaw:

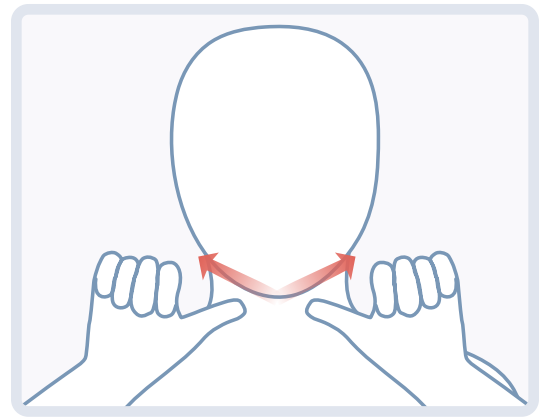
1. Place two fingers under the jaw by your chin. With light pressure, sweep your fingers to your ears. Repeat 10 times.
2. Place two fingers above the jaw by your chin. With light pressure, sweep your fingers to your ears. Repeat 10 times.



## Drain the Chin

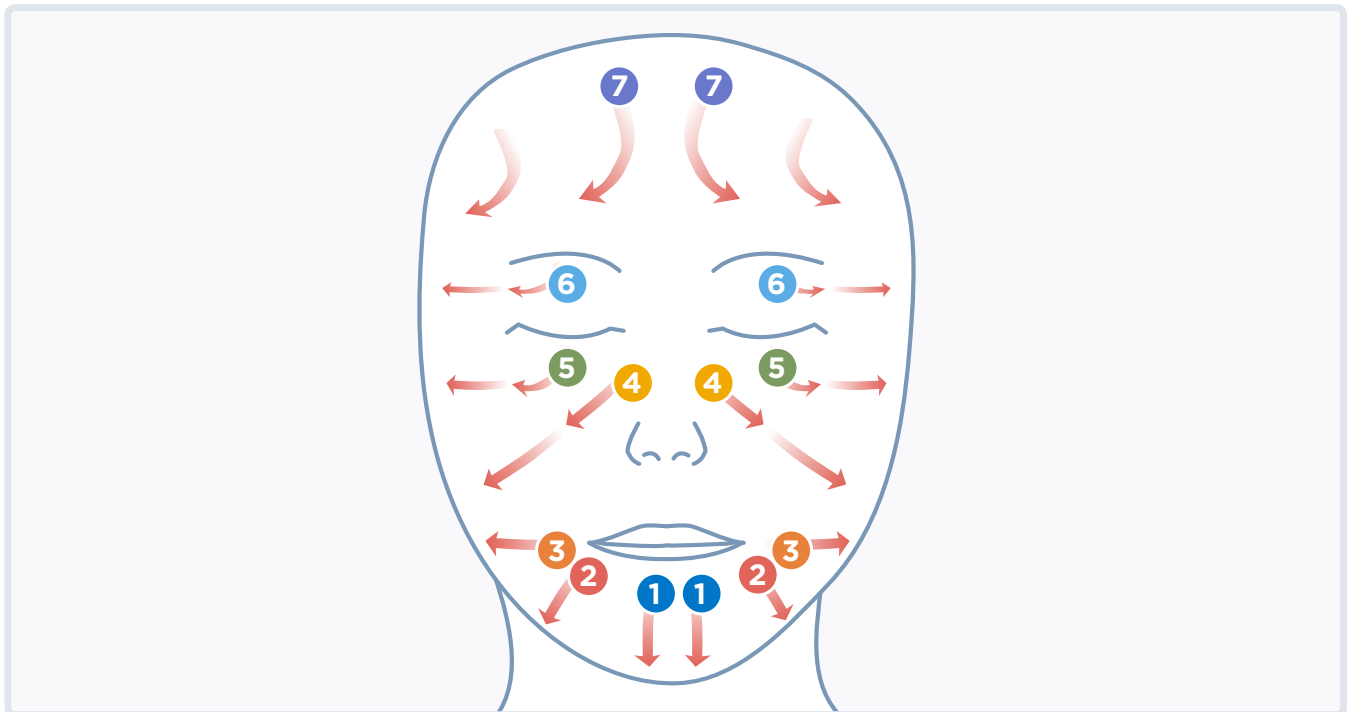
Using a very light touch and relaxed hand:

1. Place thumb pads gently under the chin.
2. With gentle pressure, stretch the skin by moving your thumbs towards the bottom of your ear.
3. Repeat 10 times.



## Drain the Face

- 1 Place your fingertips on the bottom of your chin and gently pull the skin down.
- 2 Place your fingertips at the corner of your mouth and gently pull the skin down.
- 3 Place your fingertips at the corner of your lips and gently pull the skin straight outward.
- 4 Place your fingertips at the bridge of your nose and gently pull the skin downward.
- 5 Place your fingertips under your eyes and gently pull the skin towards your ears.
- 6 Place your fingertips above your eyes and gently pull the skin towards your ear.
- 7 Please your fingertips in the middle of your forehead and gently pull down and outward. After completing this step 10 times, move your fingertips to the outer forehead and pull the skin gently down and out.











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