

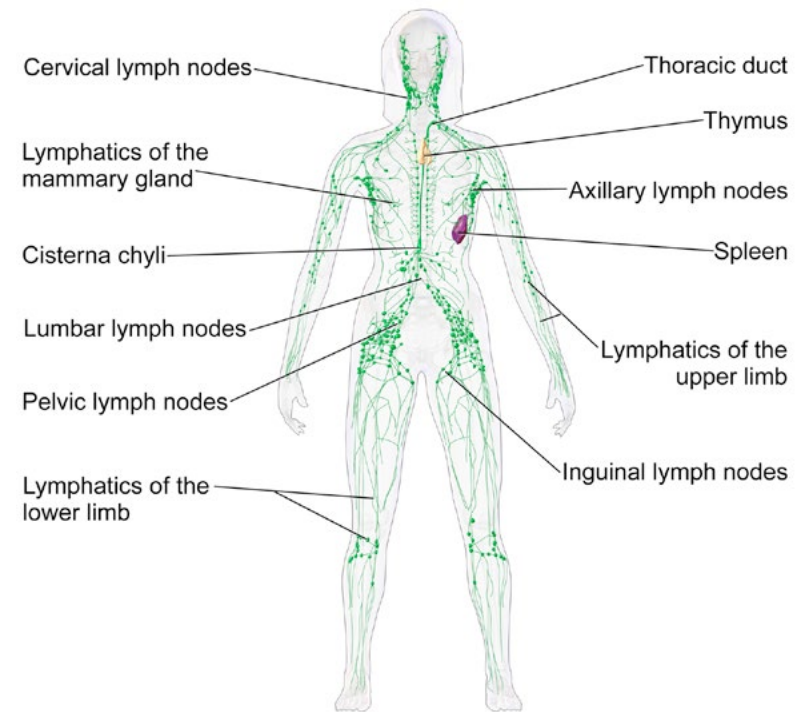
DRAIN THE LYMPHATIC SYSTEM IN THE POOL

You may have seen marketing for a type of massage that assists in draining the lymphatic system. I first heard about it on an essential oil video blog. At first, I was skeptical about the benefits for me personally and about if there was a real need for this type of massage. As I researched lymphatic drainage massage I discovered the function of the lymphatic system, why its' proper function is important for health, ways to improve and/or assist in its' function, and disorders of the lymphatic system that plague some of my clients and necessary treatment. The more I researched about the lymphatic system, the more excited I became about leading water fitness classes. It may seem like a big jump from lymphatic system to water exercise but stick with me and discover the benefits available in the pools in which we all teach.

Firstly, let's review what the lymphatic system is and what it does

WHAT IS IT: According to Wikipedia, "The lymphatic system, or lymphoid system, is an organ system in vertebrates that is part of the circulatory system and the immune system. It is made up of a large network of lymphatic vessels, lymphatic or lymphoid organs, and lymphoid tissues.

WHAT IT DOES: The vessels carry a clear fluid called lymph towards the heart. Unlike the circulatory system, the lymphatic system is not a closed system. The human circulatory system processes an average of 20 liters of blood per day through capillary filtration, which removes plasma from the blood. Roughly 17 liters of the filtered plasma is reabsorbed directly into the blood vessels, while the remaining three liters remain in the interstitial fluid. One of the main functions of the lymphatic system is to provide an accessory return route to the blood for the surplus three liters. The other main function is that of immune defense." Basically, it picks up all the leftover trash in our bodies, takes it to the trash compactor (lymph nodes) and takes it back to the circulatory system for disposal. Interestingly, the lymphatic system does not have its own pump system to move the lymph liquid. Not to worry, our bodies are



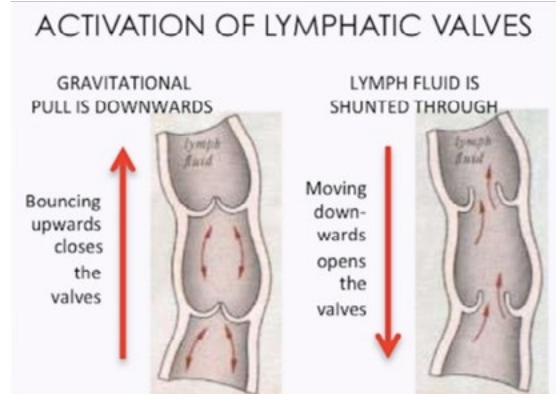
designed to assist this process through muscle contraction or movement.

WHAT MOVEMENTS ASSIST THE LYMPHATIC SYSTEM: There are specific movements that aid in the pumping and removal of the lymph liquid. The first movement to be addressed is rebounding. That's right – jumping! We do it all the time in WATERinMOTION. Rebounding is one of the most used levels used in WATERinMOTION. Its benefit to the lymphatic system is rarely discussed maybe because it is misunderstood. The simple act of jumping up and down stimulates the valves in the lymphatic system to open and close, allowing the lymph fluid to move through the system. In addition, the hydrostatic pressure of the water on the body assists in venous return.

Secondly, Joint movement and muscular contractions assist the lymphatic system to move liquid back to the circulatory system. For example, leg abduction and adduction encourages the pumping of lymph liquid in the inguinal lymph nodes. Shoulder movements encourages the pumping of lymph liquid in the axillary lymph nodes. A jumping jack in the water with arm movements that lift, lower, cross and extend the arms is effective in moving lymph liquid through the lymphatic system.

WHAT ABOUT MASSAGE AND SPA TREATMENTS?: There are also specific massage techniques that can also assist in stimulating the lymphatic system. Therapists typically serve people who have lymphedema due to surgical procedures or medical issues. I first became aware of lymphedema while teaching a cycle class. One of my students came to class with a compression sleeve on her arm. After class, I asked her about the sleeve and its function. She informed me that she had been experiencing some lymphedema in her arm as a result of breast cancer surgery and treatment that involved her lymph nodes in that area. I'm so thankful for the education she offered me on this subject. She was working with a full medical team to address her lymphedema including a certified lymphedema therapist. And while there are spa services offered involving lymphatic drainage, there is no strong evidence that supports the effectiveness of lymphatic drainage facials, so maybe spend your spa dollars elsewhere.

HYDRATION IS KEY: Proper hydration is also imperative to maintaining a high-functioning lymphatic system. Water helps skin movement and connective tissue elasticity. "Lymph vessels can become clogged with protein deposits and the flow can stagnate or even stop for reasons such as fatigue, stress, infection, emotional shock, lack of physical activity or dehydration," according to the Diagnose Me website. So, while exercising in water has great benefits, remember that drinking water is necessary not only for lymphatic activity but many health benefits.



NOW WE KNOW! ACTIVATING THE LYMPHATIC SYSTEM IS AS EASY AS 1-2-3:

1. Rebounding
2. Joint movement
3. Hydration

Encourage rebounding in your classes for the clients whose bodies tolerate it well. Of course, any client with lower body orthopedic issues should rebound only when absent of pain. Also, teach proper range of motion for movements to ensure joint action and muscular contraction is enough to assist in moving lymph fluid into and through the lymphatic system. And finally, encourage clients to hydrate throughout the day, not only during exercise. Remember, you need water, too. Let the draining begin!

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