

Manual Lymphatic Drainage. A Detoxifying Massage

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People who have had remedial massage know some of it may be painful - depending on how tight the muscles are and how deep into the tissue the therapist needs to work.

So they are **very** surprised if they try a specialist massage known as Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD) which is at the other end of the pain scale - totally pain free - and begins inducing deep relaxation virtually right from the start.

Its very gentleness is why many people have never tried MLD. Most people want or need a massage for very tight or sore muscles and believe a soft massage won't fix their problem. In that context, they are generally correct.

However, the gentleness of MLD massage belies the many health benefits that extend way beyond just relaxation.

Different Purpose.

Manual Lymphatic Drainage has a totally different purpose to deep tissue massage. It acts like a deep-cleansing treatment. It detoxifies tissues, improves circulation, nourishes and regenerates cells, and increases the body's resistance to disease.

In the past several years, I have given many MLD massages and never cease to wonder at how such a light, slow and gentle technique has such amazing healing power. I have previously written articles mentioning some instances of this healing.

One of the keys to understanding how MLD works is to realise and accept this technique is massaging fluid - not muscle - and to know the role the lymphatic system plays in the human body.

Without the lymphatic system, the cardiovascular system would stop working and the immune system would be impaired.

Each cell in the body depends for its health and survival on its ability to receive oxygen and nutrients from the bloodstream and have the waste products of cellular metabolism removed.



Fluid Medium.

Because many cells do not come into direct contact with blood vessels, it is necessary for a fluid medium to act as a carrier between the blood and the cells.

This "interstitial fluid" is derived from blood plasma, which diffuses through the walls of the capillaries, caused by slight pressure differentials through a process known as osmosis.

Various dynamics are at work forcing this fluid out of the arterial end of the capillaries and causing most of it to be reabsorbed at the venous end. Up to three litres of fluid a day remains behind and must be carried back for the cardiovascular (circulatory) system to maintain sufficient volume to function properly.

The vessels of the lymphatic system play this vital role of returning fluid to the bloodstream. Before re-entering the bloodstream in major veins above the heart, lymphatic fluid passes along lymph vessels through a series of lymph nodes, to be filtered and cleared of any toxins like foreign chemicals or invading micro-organisms. These harmful substances are normally then neutralised or destroyed.

The lymphatic system also plays another protective role by producing lymphocyte cells. B-lymphocytes release antibodies. T-lymphocytes circulate between lymph nodes, blood and lymph fluid, carrying out an important role by checking for foreign substances, viruses or cancer cells and then alerting the body's immune system for an early and rapid response.

Chemicals and pollutants absorbed through the environment or from a poor diet lead to an increase in waste products being excreted into the

lymph, which becomes viscous and slower moving. The stagnant lymph exerts pressure, producing pain, fatigue and a feeling of heaviness.

Cells Poisoned.

Cells become poisoned by their own waste products as the lymph continues to stagnate. For the lymphatic system to effectively carry out the fluid transfer and filtering functions, the lymph fluid must be able to flow freely.

When it does, it acts as an internal cleanser, regenerating cells, tissues and glands and, generally speaking, detoxifying the body. This is why MLD massage, which stimulates the flow of lymphatic fluid, can be so effective and provide so many health benefits. It helps the lymphatic fluid to move more freely and channels the fluid in specific directions to maximise the flow and filtering effect through the main lymph nodal areas.

Unlike the cardiovascular system which has the heart as a pump 24 hours a day, the lymphatic system has no pump.

The lymph system relies on activity like the squeezing action of surrounding muscles when they contract, pressure changes in the chest during breathing, the presence of one-way valves to prevent back flow, the forces of gravity and even the pump-like action of the pads of the feet when walking.

Even with these mechanisms, lymph still tends to move quite slowly. One reason you might wake up with “bags” under your eyes is that when you sleep, the lymph is partly stopped.

Fluid Retention

Very little lymph flows in parts of the body that are not moving. This is one reason why very inactive people tend to suffer fluid retention. The rationale behind immobilising a badly infected limb or, for example, after snakebite, is to prevent or reduce lymph flow and therefore the spread of toxins around the body.

Among factors slowing the flow of lymph are extremes of cold or heat, tense muscles and nerves and over-exertion.

This over-exertion may be one reason why even super fit Defence members and athletes often seem to find themselves susceptible to every virus or “wog” doing the rounds. It would seem that with the “healthy” lifestyle of fitness enthusiasts, the

opposite should be the case.

Prevent Illness.

I have had clients who sought MLD massage to try to prevent becoming sick when others in their workplace were coming down with viruses, colds, etc. The massages seem to have worked, but how do you scientifically prove a person DIDN'T get sick because they had a massage!

As mentioned earlier, Manual Lymphatic Drainage very gently massages fluid, not muscles. MLD consists of a series of slow, light, rhythmical pumping movements, followed by long, gentle strokes. This results in a wave-like movement along the lymph vessels, encouraging the flow of lymph and the removal of any congestion.

It is not unusual in a MLD massage for the client to feel like a “pit stop” during the massage - even in the first 20 to 30 minutes - because so much fluid already has been moved.

One thing competent and experienced MLD therapists can confidently say to their clients is that even if they don't feel any specific effects or benefits from the massage - say within a day or two, they will still have had a super relaxing massage.

After Effects.

Some of the less pleasant after effects, however, may be a feeling of tiredness and lethargy as well as various aches and pains. A dull headache is not uncommon.

There may be slight nausea, an increase in nasal discharge, possibly a stronger-than-normal body odour, or even diarrhoea. These are all caused by the extra toxins that have been liberated and are moving round the body, and need to be flushed out.

Drinking plenty of water will help flush them and reduce any of the less pleasant effects, which will only be short term.

As a general rule, people wanting a full body MLD massage from a qualified therapist should allow at least two hours.