



# Manual Lymphatic Drainage

By Michelle Yaffe



**Rhythm**Massage

# What is MLD?

---

- The lymphatic system is the front line in our defense in fighting bodily infections, detoxifying the body and transporting metabolic waste, excess fluid, toxins and bacteria out of the body.
- Manual lymphatic drainage is a very specific massage technique which helps to ensure our bodies ability to rejuvenate and establish resistance to all types of stress placed on it, encouraging the natural circulation of lymph through the body.
- It is not a muscular massage but a harmonious manual treatment using mild mechanical stretching of the connective tissue to facilitate decongestion of lymph ducts. This allows regenerative fluid to flow and improves circulation and toxin removal as well as carrying vital substances to areas where it is needed, thus hastening healing times.

# What does it do for our clients?

---

- MLD stimulates the lymphatic system to absorb and transport lymph more effectively and permits lymph to be directed across physiological boundaries to functioning lymph nodes where it is cleaned of toxins and other debris.
- It also stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system via the 'relaxation effect', thus inhibiting pain and muscle tonus.
- It assists our clients with detoxification.



# Importance for Therapists

---

- MLD is an important modality for any massage therapist to learn.
- It allows us as therapists to offer an alternative to our clients when regular massage is contraindicated.
- It also provides welcome relief to the therapist reducing the need for physically intensive deep pressure techniques.



# Role of Lymphatics

---

- The lymphatic system is the body's waste disposal unit, acting as a giant detox plant, mopping up daily toxins.
- It is part of both the circulatory system and the immune system. It assists in maintaining our homeostatic fluid volume.
- It picks up excess fluid and protein thus preventing toxic shock. Helps to transport immunocompetent cells around the body to localize infection.
- Carries food components absorbed from the small intestines to the blood circulation.

# What can we use MLD for?

---

Listed below are a few applications for MLD, there are many others:

- fluid retention
- lymphoedema
- sinusitis/hay fever
- dentistry
- liposculpture
- breast surgery (segmental, simple and total mastectomy)
- neurology - migraines
- pain relief and anti inflammatory
- gastro enterology - constipation and digestive disorders
- carpel tunnel
- pre and post surgery
- post sporting
- cfs (myelgic encephelomyelitis)/ fibromyalgia
- bruising
- oedema during pregnancy

# Contraindications to MLD

---

There are some contraindications to MLD.  
When in doubt don't treat, get a referral first.

- malignant tumors
- acute inflammation
- acute bronchitis
- asthma due to heart problems
- chronic bronchitis (if infection is present)
- dvt
- arteriosclerosis
- undiagnosed abdominal pain
- acute hypotension
- hyperthyroidisms (over function of the thyroid)

# Brief history of MLD

---

- Jean Pecquet had previously noted the lymphatic system in animals in 1651, and Pecquet's discovery of the thoracic duct and its entry into the veins made him the first person to describe the correct route of the lymphatic fluid into the blood. Shortly after the publication of Pecquet's a similar discovery of the human lymphatic system was published by Olof Rudbeck in 1653
- There were a number of other practitioners who were also interested in MLD as early as the 19th century. These include, Alexander of Winiwater and Frederick P Millard. In "Applied Anatomy of the Lymphatics", 1922 he used the term 'lymphatic drainage' and suggested different lymphatic drainage techniques to affect the lymphatic flow. Alexis Carrel who won a Nobel prize in 1912 in Physiology/Medicine, also understood that our health depends on lymph circulation.

# Brief history of MLD

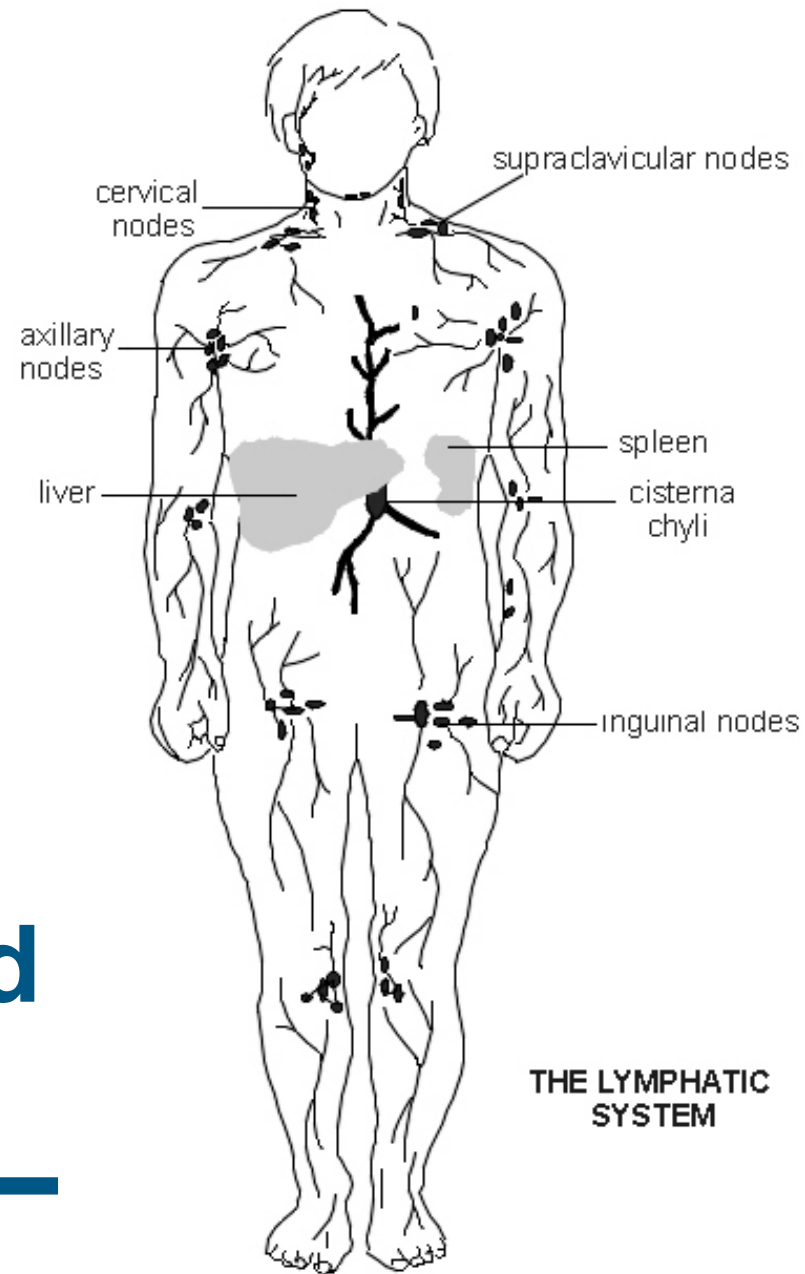
---

- Manual Lymphatic Drainage was pioneered by Dr. Emil Vodder in the 1930s for the treatment of chronic sinusitis and other immune disorders, and is now recognized as a primary tool in Lymphoedema management. However because he was a massage therapist and not a GP he had a difficult time getting recognition of his technique. There are other styles of MLD also devised which use a slightly different approach.
- In 1967 Johannes Asdoch, a German physician began scientifically testing the MLD technique on over twenty thousand patients and was able to clearly establish its medical benefits, its indications and contra indications.
- Bruno Chikly, MD, France was the first to recognize the specific rhythm of the lymphatic flow and teach how to attune with it manually.



# Major nodes locations around the body

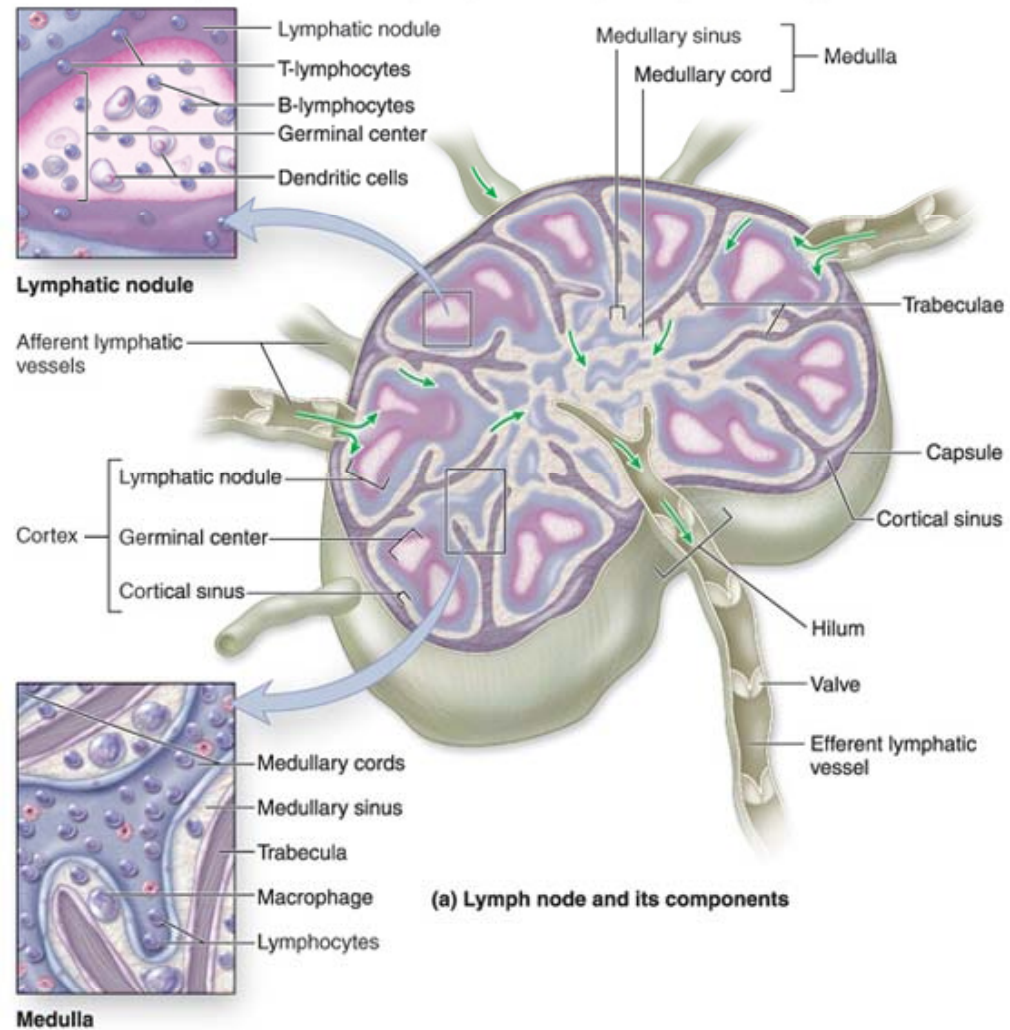
---





# Anatomy of a Lymph Node

Copyright © The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. Permission required for reproduction or display.





# The Lymph Journey

---

Lymph starts out as tissue fluid:

- is collected by the lymphatic capillaries
- moves into lymphatic vessels
- moves through lymph nodes (centres of filtration)
- moves through larger lymph vessels
- collects in the lymph trunks (either thoracic duct or right lymphatic duct)
- is dumped into the right or left subclavian veins and returned to the heart as part of the circulatory system



# Things which effect the lymphatic system

---

Lymphatic flow can stagnate or stop for many reasons, some of these include:

- fatigue
- stress
- emotional shock
- being overweight
- chemical overloading
- food additives
- toxin accumulation
- sedentry lifestyle (SeDS)

# Specificity of the MLD Application

---

- In the delivery of MLD the following are particularly important.
- Low pressure as 70% of lymph fluid sits just below the skin above the muscle fascia. The deeper lymphatics are much harder to locate during the application of MLD, these are usually activated by muscle contractions.
- Correct sequence is very important to clear pathways and overcome fluid inertia.

# Specificity of the MLD Application

---

- Orientation and direction. Always to work proximal to distal. This allows room to be made for fluid flowing from the distal region.
- Stroke duration (at least 5-7 passes per stroke) and speed (rhythmic alternating pressure with a no pressure and pressure phase in each stroke. The pressure phase lasts longer than the no pressure stage.)
- About 1.5-2 litres of lymph per day circulate throughout the whole body. Efficient activation of the lymphatic circulation can increase this figure to 15-30 litres per day.
- Circles are made WITH the skin, not ON the skin.



# Basic Strokes

---

- The manual maneuvers are very subtle.
- Work is generally performed with the flat of the hand using all the fingers to stimulate aquatic, wave like movements.
- There are four basic strokes:
  - Stationary Circles – a circular stroke with one hand on top of the other, using two hands working as one.
  - Pump Grip – a milking or pumping style of stroke which utilises a squeezing, pushing motion.
  - Scoop Grip – similar to pump grip but more of a rolling rather than squeezing action.
  - Combination Stroke – a combination of pump grip with stationary circles using both hands. Used for large flat surfaces such as flanks.

# Physiological effects of MLD

---

- Nervous system: MLD stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system reducing pain by sedating sensory nerve endings. It also has an analgesic/anti inflammatory effect. MLD also relaxes tonic organs and muscles softening tissues.
- Immune system: the passage of lymph in the lymph nodes stimulates the immune system. According to research conducted by Bruno Chikly the body produces 30% more immuno competent cells post MLD.
- Fluid circulation and elimination: by activating lymph function and circulation there is a reduction of fluid and greater elimination of fluid from the interstitial tissues. This leads to greater tissue health and easier lymphatic flow.

# MLD today

---

- MLD is widely used throughout Europe and is highly recognized and recommended by the medical institution. Doctors commonly prescribe this treatment and not only is it reimbursed by private health funds but also by European social security.
- Unfortunately MLD is not widely understood or recommended by the Australian medical profession. There may be a number of factors related to this including the small number of practicing qualified therapists and lack of public understanding/education about this therapy.



# MLD today

---

- The biggest negative that we as therapists have to deal with today is that clients feel that an MLD massage does nothing. This is due to the slow, super light pressure used to execute MLD. Our clients lack the understanding of the physiology of the lymphatic system to understand why it must be performed this way.
- In the last two years MLD has gained some ground in surgeries, beauty clinics and medical centers as a relevant and appropriate therapy for many types of illnesses.

# Australian Research Findings

---

- Using both case studies and clinical trials Professor Neil Piller published research findings in "Massage Australia" (issue 53, 2006) in which he presented objective evidence for the beneficial effect of MLD.
- The most relevant findings of the research include the following:
  - MLD is able to facilitate both subjective and objective improvements in Lymphoedema.
  - Patient response was very positive in terms of significant improvements in how a limb effected by lymphoedema feels post MLD.
  - Even a single MLD session is beneficial to the lymphatic system.