

LYMPHOEDEMA AND MANUAL LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE MASSAGE (MLD)

Have you ever come across the following terms and wondered what they mean?

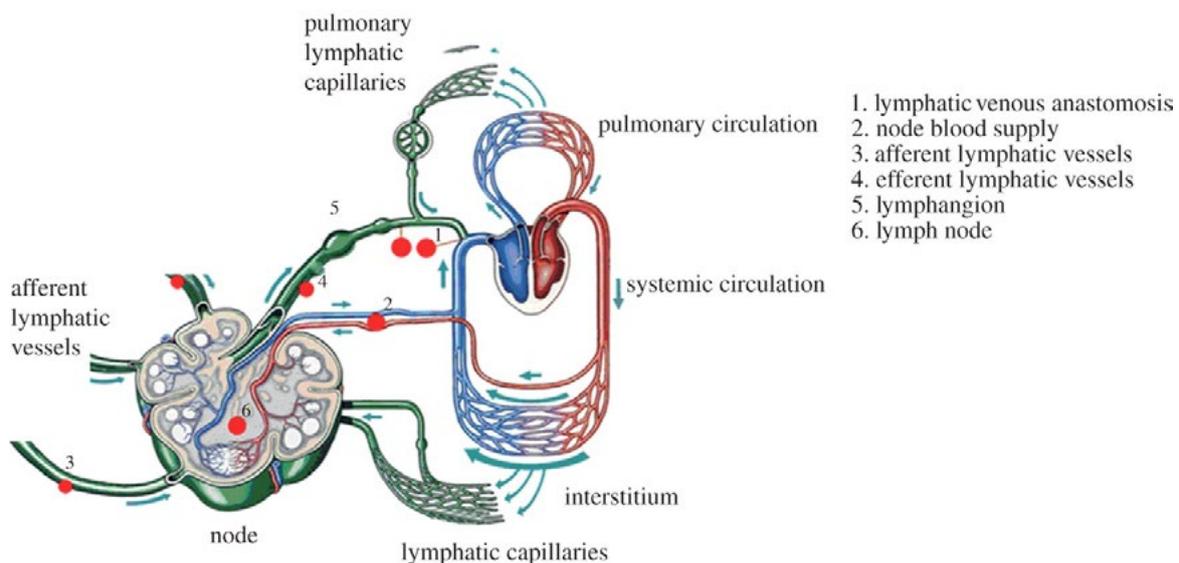
- LYMPH DRAINAGE THERAPY
- MLD
- SLD
- LYMPHATIC MASSAGE
- MANUAL LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE

They all refer to a form of touch therapy that specifically aims to influence the body's lymphatic system.

LYMPHATIC SYSTEM is the body's defence against infection. Lymph fluid flows along lymphatic vessels throughout the body supplying nutrients and removing toxins from tissues.

Lymph nodes filter out excess proteins, dead and abnormal cells and bacteria, returning cleansed lymph back into the blood stream. Most of us are aware of nodes in our neck, armpits and groins, but all parts of the body have groups of lymph nodes constantly filtering lymph fluid.

When the system's drainage routes or filters are blocked, damaged, or absent, lymph can accumulate in the tissues causing swelling (lymphoedema). M.L.D can help re-establish balance and flow and reduce swelling, heaviness and discomfort.



PUT SIMPLY M.L.D MEANS:

Manual = by hand

Lymphatic = affecting the body's lymphatic system

Drainage = movement/flow of fluid

TIP: Many beauty therapists and Spa's offer 'Lymphatic Drainage' or claim that their massage will enhance the lymphatic system. Usually these types of treatments are unsuitable for people with a compromised lymphatic system, such as lymphoedema, because the therapy is not based on medical knowledge and specific lymphoedema training.

Always check a therapist's credentials before receiving treatment if you have lymphoedema. See advice below.

Q. How do I know if the therapist is properly qualified?

A. Several training schools are recognised in the UK and Internationally eg: Leduc, Casley-Smith, Vodder, Foeldii, L.T.A . Ask to see your therapist's certificates before being treated. They will be on their training school register and may also be registered with BLS (British Lymphology Society), or MLDUK.

Remember: LYMPHOEDEMA is a medical condition so it is important that the treatment you receive is by someone who is appropriately trained and has the correct knowledge and skills. This is why some people consider M.L.D, to be a 'medical massage' and why it is regarded as an important corner stone of lymphoedema management.

Q. HOW DOES MLD WORK?

A bit more physiology.....

Just beneath the surface of our skin is a network of tiny lymphatic vessels, draining fluid (lymph) into deeper channels throughout the whole body, from the top of the head to the tips of our toes. Unlike the blood circulation, there is no organ (heart) to force fluid along vessels. Instead lymph is dependent on muscular contraction to squeeze fluid on it's way. BUT, when the system is damaged or not correctly formed, this fluid becomes trapped in the tissues, creating a 'traffic jam' of protein rich lymph fluid. Sometimes it becomes so jammed-up (congested) that the swollen area feels hard and tender and the skin may become pink.

Amazingly, this blockage can sometimes be dispersedand quite simply too..... with MLD.

In all the techniques, MLD is a relatively light form of massage. No oils or creams are used. Hand movements over the skin gently stretch the skin surface in a specific direction. This encourages lymph fluid to be pushed along tiny lymphatic channels away from the swelling and towards a different set of lymph nodes. In this way fluid is taken up by vessels and nodes that are working well without causing swelling elsewhere. In effect MLD creates a 'bypass' around the damaged or ineffective vessels.

How amazing is that?

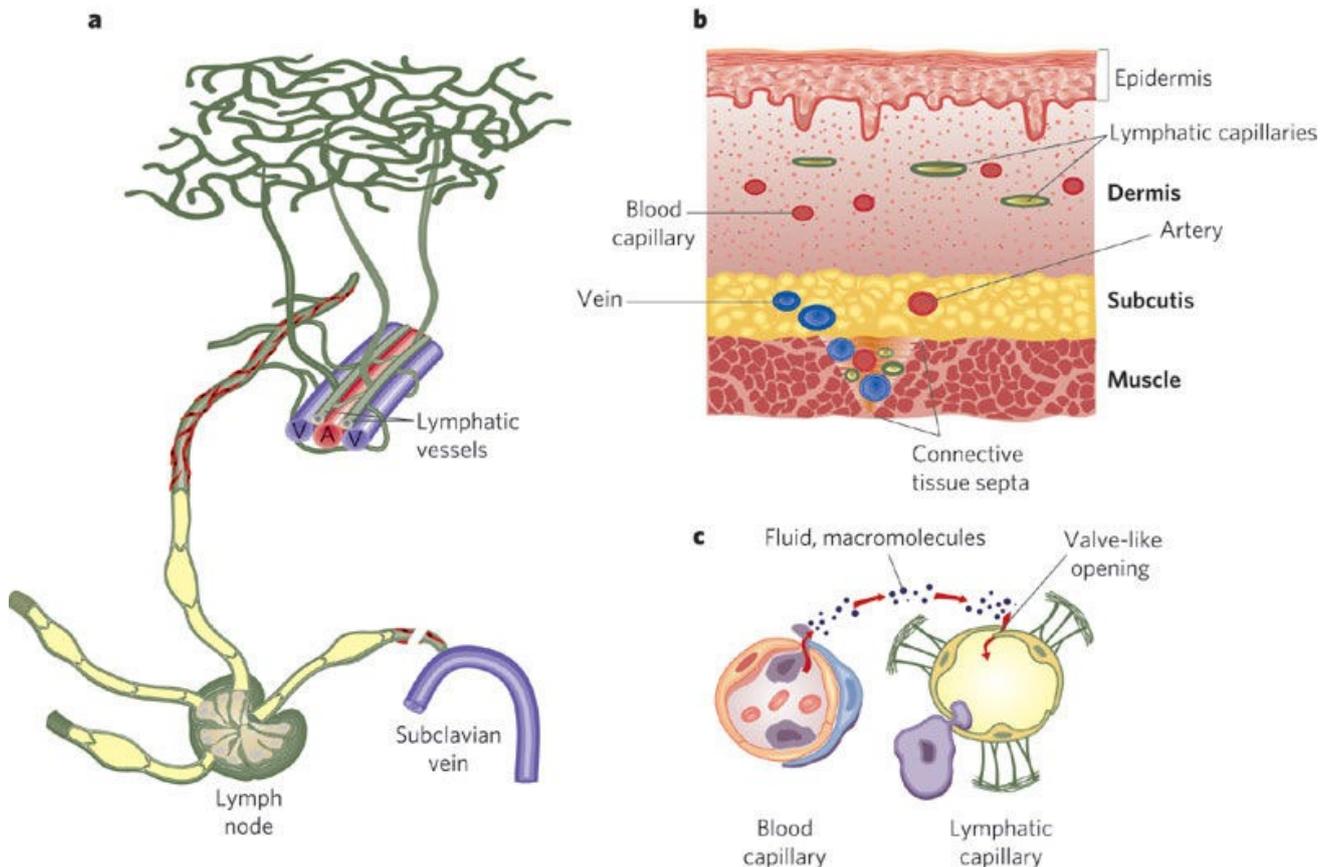
So MLD is really clearing a 'traffic jam', and what's more YOU can also do this yourself as part of your daily routine. It really helps.

TIP: ASK your Lymphoedema therapist to teach you (or a partner or friend) how to perform a simplified sequence self massage movements for daily use, (SLD). Make sure you do these everyday as part of your self management.

SO WHEN IS MLD USED?

MLD has long been considered 1 of the 'FOUR CORNERSTONES' for managing lymphoedema.

Until recently there has been little scientific evidence for MLD, but improved research methods and imaging techniques are now showing how and why this gentle technique can have a direct influence on reducing swelling (oedema) in lymphatic impairment, especially in secondary lymphoedema.



FOUR CORNERSTONES FOR LYMPHOEDEMA

- SKIN AND NAIL CARE
- MLD/SLD
- COMPRESSION
- EXERCISE

MLD is particularly beneficial when lymphoedema occurs in areas which a compression garment cannot be worn or tolerated, such as shoulder or top of the arm, head, face, neck, breast, torso, genital area.

MLD is often used during an initial intensive course of treatment alongside compression, which may include bandaging, skin care and exercise.

MLD may be used when:

- Swelling is at the root (top) of the limb
- Swelling is in the midline, ie: chest, breast, head and neck, abdomen, back and genitals
- To relieve discomfort and reduce pain when other physical treatments are not effective
- As part of pain management
- It may also be used in private practice as a relaxation treatment, as a safe whole body massage for
- People with skin allergies and to treat other minor disorders such as sinusitis

Q. Can anyone have MLD?

A. No. There are some medical conditions for which MLD is considered unsafe. Therefore it is important that you tell your therapist all of your medical history and that they examine you before treatment.

CONTRAINDICATIONS FOR MLD.

- ACUTE CELLULITIS/ERYSIPELAS (SKIN INFECTIONS)
- KIDNEY FAILURE
- UNSTABLE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE
- SEVERE HEART PROBLEMS
- LIVER CIRRHOSIS
- SUPERIOR VENA CAVA OBSTRUCTION
- UNTREATED TUBERCULOSIS OR MALARIA
- UNTREATED THYROID PROBLEMS
- OVER A TUMOUR
- WHERE THERE IS A RECURRENCE OF CANCER

In advanced cancer, MLD can be used with medical and patient consent for symptom management.

Q. HOW OFTEN WILL I HAVE MLD?

A. Your Lymphoedema specialist will plan with you, the frequency and duration of any proposed treatments.

Frequency may vary depending on the nature of your swelling and what part of the body is affected.

Practicalities, such as appointment and therapist availability, and your ability to attend will have to be considered.

If you have other medical appointments, priorities will need to be considered.

Usually appointments are more frequent initially: eg: several times/week, or weekly.

At each appointment your therapist will be assessing progress and may adjust plans accordingly.

Q. HOW LONG IS AN MLD SESSION?

A. This depends on the area needing MLD and also whether it is part of combination therapy, such as compression bandaging. (Usually 20-30minutes).

Independent Practitioners may allow longer treatment times, which are not feasible in busy clinics. Some clinics may use compression pumps such as Lymph Assist to enhance drainage and soften congested areas, because the wave action mimics MLD. MLD / SLD to stimulate alternative drainage pathways and nodes MUST be performed first.

Q.WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE?

A. Usually you will lie on a massage couch for treatment, and you may be asked to change position to enable the therapist to treat different areas of the body. Head and neck MLD is often performed while you are seated. MLD relies on skin to skin contact. So you will be asked to remove some clothing, but towels will be provided to maintain your dignity. You may be asked to do some deep breathing at the beginning and end of treatment, you will be shown the correct way to do this. MLD is so relaxing that sometimes patients even fall asleep! As the therapist massages your skin you will feel a very light skin stretch sensation.

TIP: If your swelling is tender due to the congestion, tell your therapist, they may need to focus their massage away from the affected area instead. Gradually as the swelling softens and fluid disperses the area will become more comfortable.

After a treatment, sit up slowly to prevent feeling dizzy. Keep well hydrated. Follow the advice that your therapist gives you.

TIP: Ask to be taught SELF LYMPHATIC MASSAGE and do this at least once a day, preferably twice. It's another 'TOOL' in your 'LYMPHOEDEMA TOOLBOX'.

Q. Can I have MLD privately?

A. Yes , Some people choose to have 'top up' treatments privately as part of their own self management plan. Always check that the person is appropriately trained and

experienced in Lymphoedema Management.
Check with your regular Lymphoedema specialist first.
See if they are registered with BLS, MLDUK and check that they are fully insured.

Q. How much does private MLD cost?

A. It depends where you live. Average costs are approx £45-75hour, but these are very variable, so ask BEFORE you book a treatment. There is usually a cancellation missed appointment charge too.

Some therapists are registered with BUPA and some Health Plans will reimburse for Medical MLD.

BUT REMEMBER:

- MLD is not a stand alone treatment for managing lymphoedema.
- It is not curative.
- It does not replace compression.
- Daily use of Compression Garments, exercise, a healthy diet and skin care are vital.

TIPS FOR REMEMBERING YOUR SELF MASSAGE SEQUENCE

- TIME and SPACE... choose when the best time is for you, no interruptions. Minimum 20 minutes.
- RELAX.
- LOOSE CLOTHING.... Loosen off any straps, belts, restrictive clothing and keep compression garment on if possible.
- BREATHE.... Deep abdominal breaths x5. Sometimes called diaphragm breathing.
- NURTURE your NODES.....Empty the lymph nodes to which you will drain fluid.
- CREATE BYPASS ROUTE.... drain away from swelling. (10-15mins)
- BREATHE..... boost drainage and relaxation.
- RAISE A GLASS..... of water... keep hydrated.

REFERENCES.

International Concensus for best practice for the management of lymphoedema.
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BLS Guidelines. 2015
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