

# Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD)

Lymphatic drainage is a specialized form of massage designed to attain and sustain proper functioning of the lymphatic system.

**Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD)** first became known in 1935 when Dr. Emil Vodder and his wife were living and working in Cannes, France as massage therapists. The majority of their English patients were recovering from persistent colds and they discovered that all those patients had swollen lymph nodes in their necks.

At that stage it was taboo for massage therapists to treat the lymphatic system. Vodder challenged the taboo and treated the swollen nodes, his clients colds vanished.

Supported by this success, he developed MLD.

The lymphatic system forms part of our immune system, helping cope with infection by cleansing and detoxifying the body's tissues. Unlike the circulatory system where the heart pumps blood around the body, lymph vessels rely upon the flow of the fluid through the vessels to stimulate a muscular impulse by lymphangions, tiny muscular units within the vessels to propel the fluid. This enables transport of proteins, dead blood cells, toxins, fatty acids, hormones and immune cells to the lymph nodes which produce lymphocytes (immune cells) to destroy and remove cellular debris and foreign, unwanted cells.

There are approximately 400-700 lymph nodes in the human body. Almost half are located in the abdomen. The main groups of nodes are found in the neck, armpits, abdomen and groin. Lymph nodes have specific functions:



## Functions of the lymphatic system

- Drainage of fluid from blood stream into the tissues – The circulating blood through narrow vessels leads to leakage of fluid or plasma into the tissues carrying oxygen and nutrients to the tissues and carrying waste materials from the tissues into the lymph channels.

The leaked fluid drains into the lymph vessels. This forms a circulatory system of fluids within the body.

- Filtration of the lymph at the lymph nodes – The nodes contain white blood cells that can attack any bacteria or viruses they find in the lymph as it flows through the lymph nodes.

The cancer cells may also get trapped similarly at the lymph nodes and thus lymph nodes act as indicators of how far the cancer has already spread.

- Filtering blood – This is done by the spleen. The spleen filters out bacteria, viruses and other foreign particles.
- Raise an immune reaction and fight infections – The lymphatic system especially the lymph nodes are over active in case of an infection the lymph nodes or glands often swell up in case of a local infection.