

Step-by-step self-massage for face, head, and neck lymphedema.

Easy-to-follow instructions for self-manual lymphatic drainage (MLD).



Take control of your lymphedema journey with the practice of self-manual lymphatic drainage (MLD).

Why do self-MLD?

Self-MLD is a way of gently using your hands to help your body move lymph fluid. Doing it regularly can ease swelling and discomfort and prevent symptoms from worsening, empowering you to stay in control of your lymphedema.

Tips for success

- Wash your hands well to keep germs away.
- Sit in a quiet, comfortable space.
- Make sure the skin you need to reach is showing.
- Massage slowly and smoothly.
- Apply light pressure — enough to gently move the skin, but not the muscles underneath.
- Use your whole hand, not just your fingertips.
- Do this once a day or as directed by your doctor.

Want to follow along with a video?



You can choose to learn with a step-by-step video if that feels easier. We teamed up with Kelly Sturm, a physical therapist, to offer videos that guide you through self-MLD. Scan the QR code to pick the video for the body part you need. You can also download this guide if you'd like extra support.

This guide was developed by certified lymphedema therapists to ensure safe self-care.

Safety considerations Before beginning any self-administered MLD techniques, please consult with your healthcare provider or care team. Self-MLD may not be appropriate for all individuals, especially those with certain medical conditions such as active infections, acute congestive heart failure, or acute blood clots. Your healthcare team can help determine whether self-MLD is safe and beneficial for your specific situation. This information is intended for educational purposes only and does not replace professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always follow the guidance of your licensed healthcare provider.

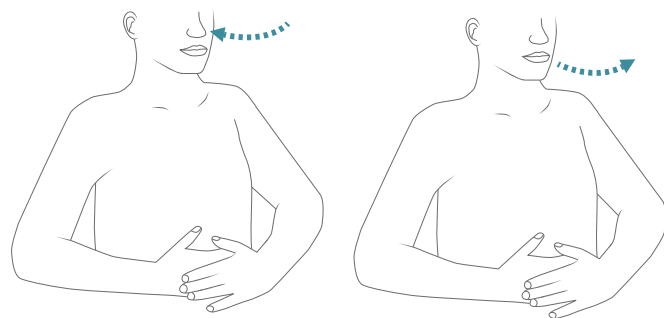
Begin by gently working on the lymph areas in your abdomen and armpits.

Why start here? Your lymph system moves fluid from your face, head, and neck toward the middle of your body and these steps help “clear the path.”

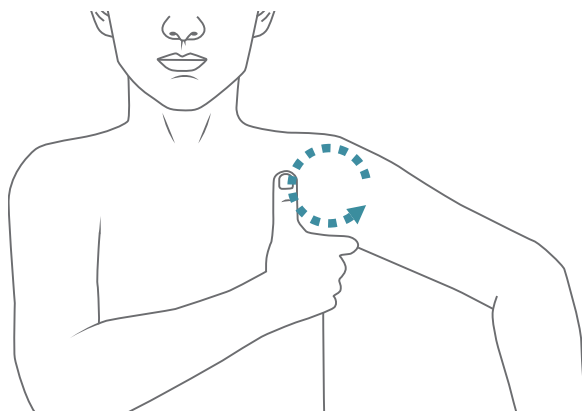
A. Abdomen and armpits

Your body has many lymph nodes in the abdominal and armpit areas, so it is important to massage these to help with movement and absorption of lymph fluid.

- A1.** Stack your palms over your belly button and take 10 slow, deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth while maintaining pressure on your belly throughout.



- A2.** Place your palm in your armpit. Circle 5–7 times. Complete this on both sides or only the side of the body that is affected by lymphedema.



Next, focus on your neck and face.

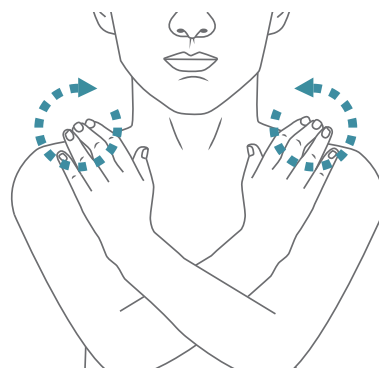
Now that your abdomen and armpits have been prepared to “clear the way” for lymphatic fluid, you’ll focus on draining your neck and face.

Complete these steps on both sides at the same time.

B. Neck

Moving fluid from your face, head, and neck by going through the lymph nodes and vessels in your neck allows the fluid to travel back to your heart.

- B1.** Place your hands at the base of your neck above your collarbones; circle 5–7 times.



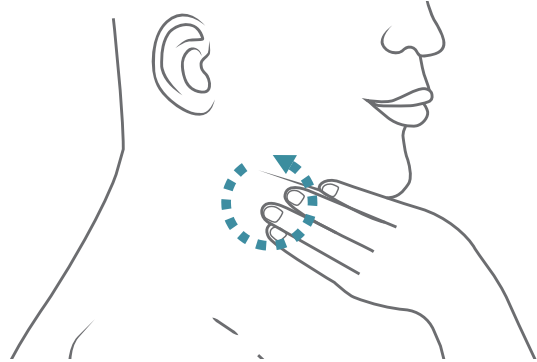
- B2.** Place your hands flat on the sides of your neck; circle 5–7 times.



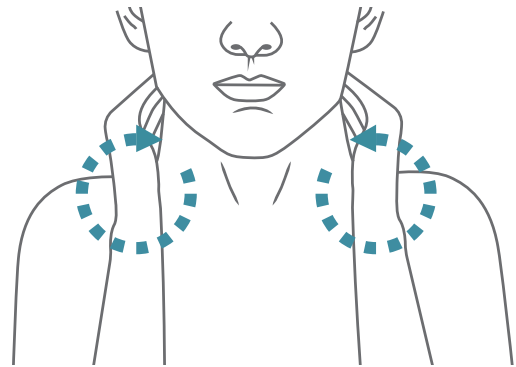
- B3.** Place 2 fingers in front of your ear and 2 behind your ear; press down slightly and move the skin in subtle, circular motions as you bring your fingertips toward the top of your ears, then back down, keeping your ear between your fingers the entire time. Do this 5–7 times.



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- B4.** Place your fingers flat under your jawline; circle 5–7 times.



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- B5.** Place your hands flat on the sides of your neck; circle 5–7 times.



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- B6.** Move your hands to the base of your neck above your collarbones; circle 5–7 times.

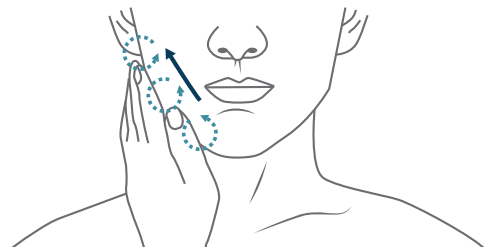


Complete these steps on both sides.

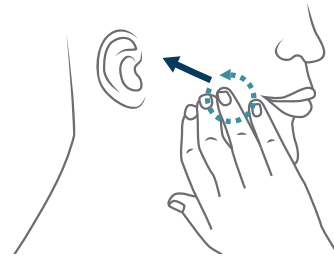
C. Face

These steps help move fluid away from your face toward lymph nodes at the sides of your neck that can help absorb the fluid.

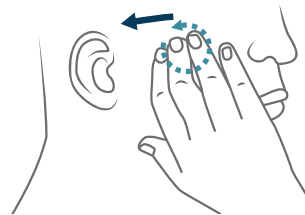
- C1.** Place your fingers flat under your chin and jaw and circle 5–7 times in each section, moving toward the bottom of your ear.



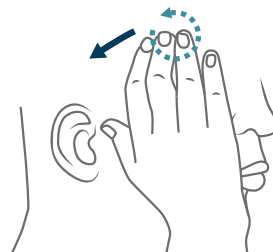
- C2.** Place your fingers flat on your lower cheek; circle 5–7 times moving toward your ear.



- C3.** Place your fingers flat on the top of your cheek under your eye; circle 5–7 times moving toward your ear.



- C4.** Place your fingers flat on your forehead; circle 5–7 times moving outward and down toward your ear.



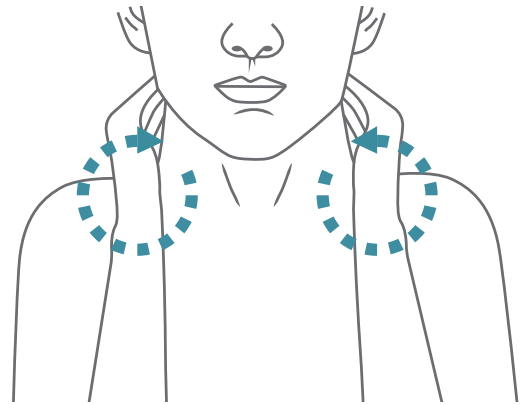
You're almost there!

Complete these steps on both sides.

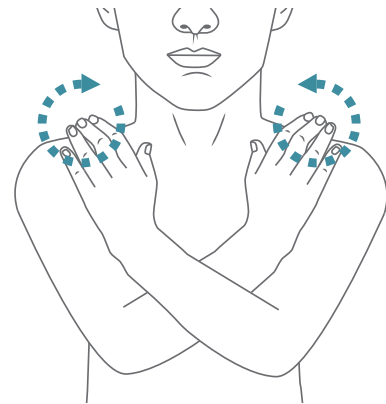
D. Final clearing movements

These final steps help move the fluid cleared from your face, head, and neck toward your armpit and abdominal areas.

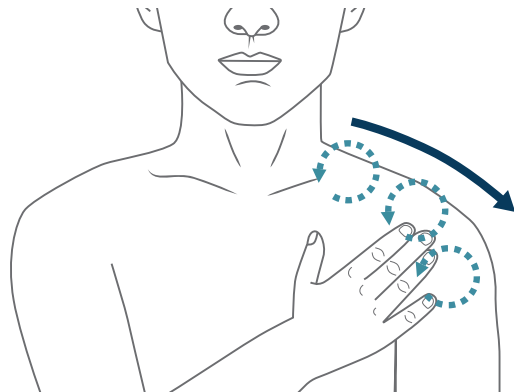
- D1.** Place your hands flat on the sides of your neck; circle 5–7 times.



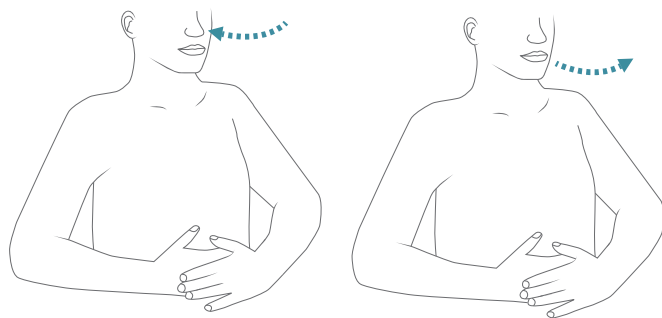
- D2.** Move your hands to the base of your neck above your collarbone; circle 5–7 times.



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- D3.** With a flat palm, complete multiple passes of 5–7 circles moving from your collarbone to your armpit on the same side.



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- D4.** Stack your palms over your belly button and take 10 slow, deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth while maintaining pressure on your belly throughout.



**Congratulations on completing your self-MLD today
and managing your lymphedema on your terms!**

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