

Step-by-step self-massage for lower body 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, avoiding areas with open skin.
- 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 neck and chest.

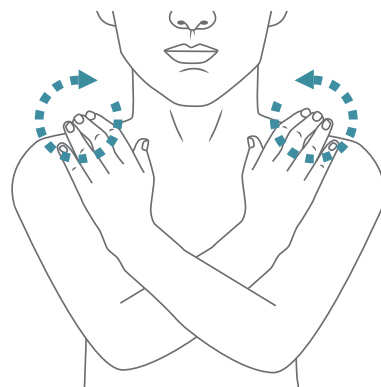
Why start here? Your lymph system moves fluid from your arms and legs toward the middle of your body and “clears the path” so fluid can move more easily from your arms and legs.

Complete these steps on both sides at the same time.

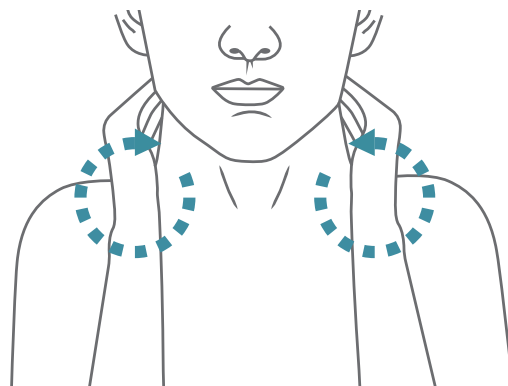
A. Neck and collarbones

This step helps lymph fluid flow back to your heart.

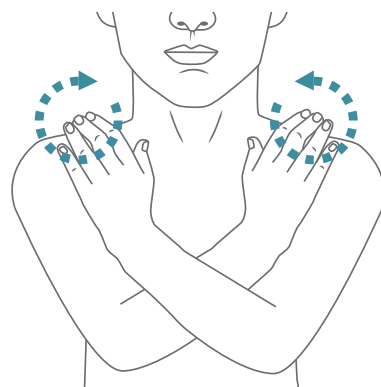
- A1.** Place your hands at the base of your neck above your collarbones; circle 5–7 times.



- A2.** Place your hands flat on the sides of your neck; circle 5–7 times.



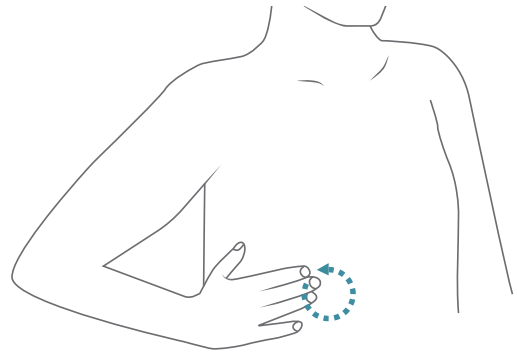
- A3.** Return your hands to your collarbone area; circle 5–7 times



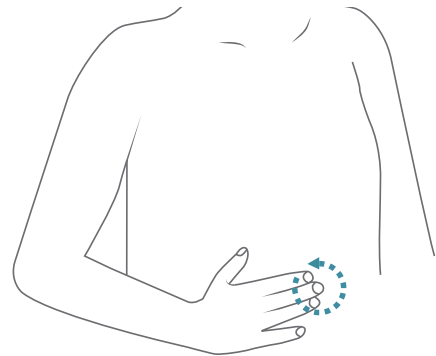
B. Abdomen

The body has many lymph nodes and vessels in the abdominal area, so it is important to help lymph fluid move from your legs back to your heart.

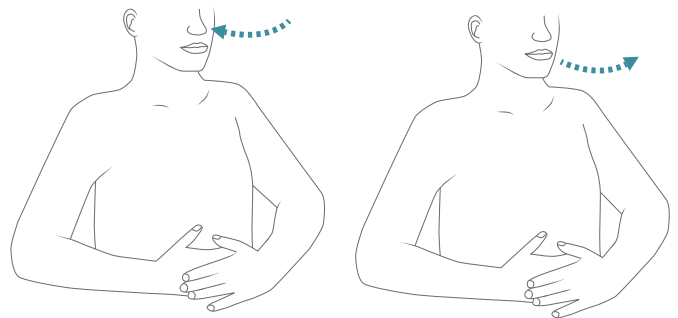
- B1.** Using the flat palm of whichever hand is comfortable, circle 5–7 times under your left ribs, then 5–7 times under your right ribs.



- B2.** Using the flat palm of whichever hand is comfortable, circle 5–7 times around your belly button.



- B3.** 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.

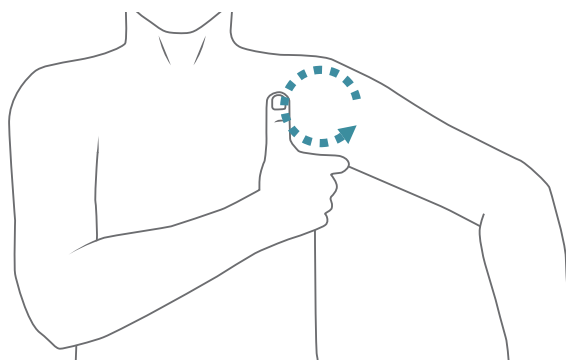


If both legs are affected by lymphedema, complete these steps on both sides.
If only one leg is affected, complete these steps on your affected side.

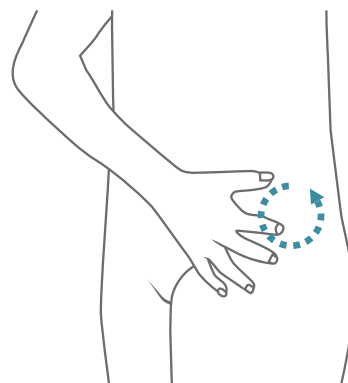
C. Armpit and groin

Lymph nodes in your armpit and groin areas can help absorb fluid from the lower body.

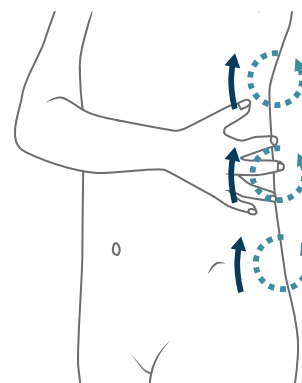
- C1.** Raise one arm slightly and place your palm in your armpit; circle 5–7 times



- C2.** Place your flat palm in the hip crease (groin); circle 5–7 times.



- C3.** Use your flat palm to circle 5–7 times in sections moving from the groin to the armpit.



Next, focus on leg and foot lymphatic drainage.

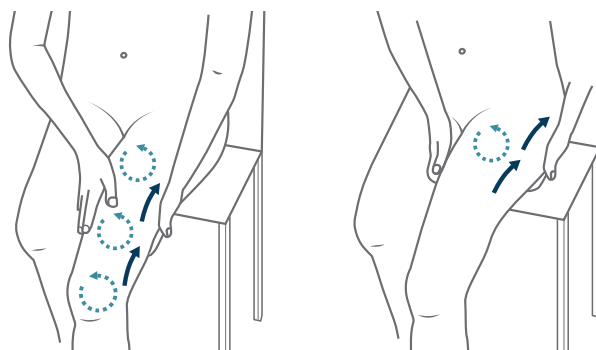
Now that the upper body has been prepared to “clear the way” for fluid from your lower body, the remaining steps focus on draining the leg(s).

If both legs are affected by lymphedema, complete these steps on both sides.
If only one leg is affected, complete these steps on your affected side.

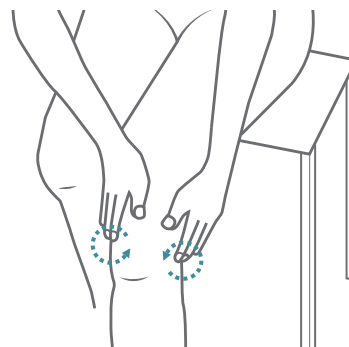
D. Thigh and knee

Lymph nodes behind your knee help absorb fluid, and lymphatic vessels throughout your thigh help transport fluid toward your groin lymph nodes.

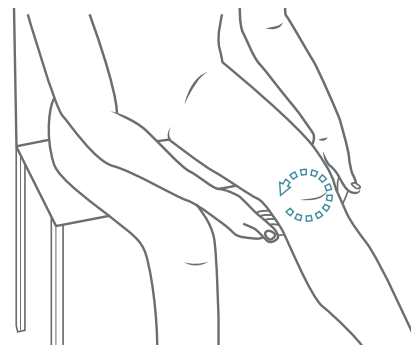
- D1.** Working upward from your knee to the groin, use your hands to circle 5–7 times in multiple sections on all sides of your upper leg.



- D2.** On both sides of your knee, use your hands to circle 5–7 times.



- D3.** In the crease behind your knee, use your hands to circle 5–7 times.

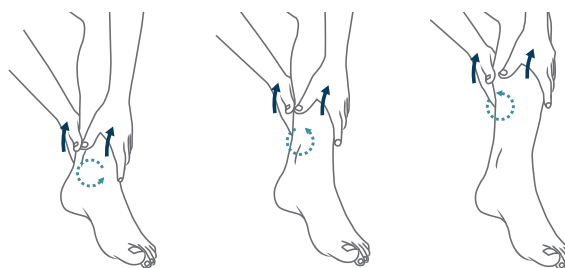


If both legs are affected by lymphedema, complete these steps on both sides.
If only one leg is affected, complete these steps on your affected side.

E. Lower leg and foot

Lymphatic vessels throughout your lower leg and foot help move fluid toward your groin lymph nodes.

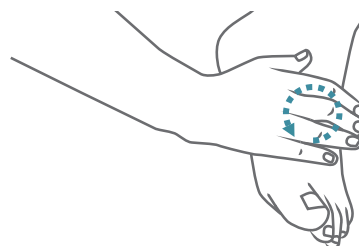
- E1.** Working upward from your ankle to your knee, use your hands to circle 5–7 times in multiple sections on all sides of your lower leg.



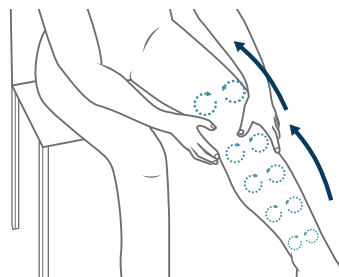
- E2.** Use your hands to circle 5–7 times at the front and sides of your ankle.



- E3.** Use your hand to circle 5–7 times on top of your foot and toes.



- E4.** Use your hands to circle 5–7 times in multiple sections working your way up from your foot toward your groin.

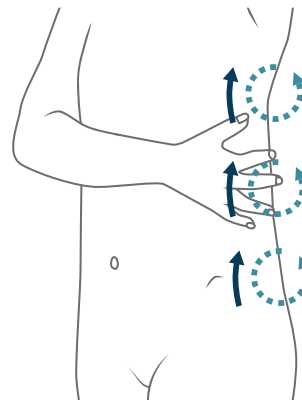


You're almost there!

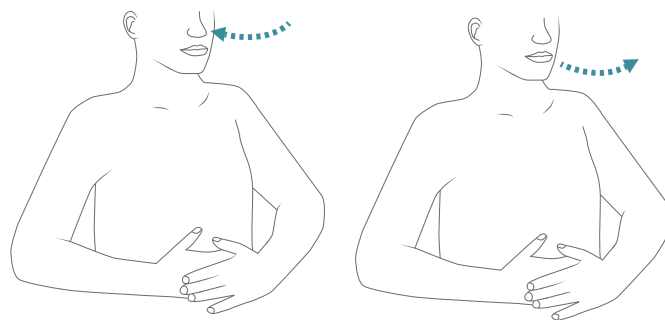
F. Final clearing movements

These final steps help move the fluid cleared from your leg(s) toward your armpit and abdominal areas.

- F1.** Return to your groin and use your flat palm to circle 5–7 times in multiple sections working your way up to your armpit area. If both legs are affected by lymphedema, complete these steps on both sides. If only one leg is affected, complete these steps on your affected side.



- F2.** 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!**

Tactile Medical
3701 Wayzata Blvd, Suite 300
Minneapolis, MN 55416 USA

tactilemedical.com

Customer Care
Text or Call: 612.355.5100
Toll Free Phone: 833.3TACTILE (833.382.2845)
Fax: 612.355.5101 / Toll Free Fax: 866.435.3949
Email: customerservice@tactilemedical.com
Hours: 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. CT, Monday–Friday

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