**Lymphatic Drainage Therapy**

Lymphatic drainage is the natural function of the lymphatic system, which is an essential part of immunity. If this function isn't working properly, it can cause a build-up of fluid in tissues as well as more serious medical problems like lymphagitis and lymphoma. Though most of the conditions caused by poor lymphatic drainage are treatable, some require prompt hospitalization and immediate medical care, since they can easily spread throughout the body. There is also a type of therapeutic massage called Lymphatic Drainage Therapy (LDT) to help this system work and to treat some of the conditions associated with the lymphatic system.

**Lymphatic System**

The lymphatic system is made up of a network of thin tubes that run throughout the body called lymph vessels and oval-shaped organs called lymph nodes, which collect and filter lymph. As blood flows throughout the body, a thin, yellow fluid called plasma leaks out from blood vessels and mixes with interstitial fluid and water to surround the cells in different tissues. This mixture contains food for the cells, blood cells that are important for immunity, and also waste put out by the cells. It drains into the lymph vessels, after which it is called lymph, and is then transported to lymph nodes, which contain immune cells. Since the lymphatic system doesn't have any way to move the fluid on its own, it relies on the movement from muscles in the body to push the fluid along, and valves to keep the fluid going in the right direction.

Once in the lymph nodes, the fluid is filtered, any disease-causing organisms are killed. Other organs that work with this system include the spleen, which takes out dead or damaged red blood cells and contains white blood cells to fight disease, and the thymus, which produces more white blood cells. The tonsils and adenoids also work with this system and protect the digestive system and respiratory system specifically.

**Problems with Lymphatic Drainage**

Since the lymphatic system plays such an important part in immunity, problems with lymphatic drainage can cause very serious health conditions. When lymph vessels or nodes are damaged or missing, the fluid cannot move quickly away from an area of the body. This causes it to pool up in the surrounding body tissue, causing it to swell. This is called lymphedema. If the fluid remains in the tissue for a long period of time, it can prevent the transportation of oxygen from the bloodstream to the tissue's cells and interfere with wound healing.

If the swelling is not treated, it can lead to the hardening of muscle tissue, skin deterioration, a loss of movement in the area, and in some cases, a bacterial infection called lymphagitis. This condition causes the lymph vessels to become swollen, inflamed, and painful, and red lines may appear along the skin above the vessels. It requires immediate medical attention to keep it from spreading throughout the body, and is generally treated with painkillers, antibiotics, and anti-inflammatory medications.

People with severely compromised lymphatic drainage may also have lymphoma, a type of cancer. There are about 40 different types of this cancer, which are generally divided into Hodgkin's and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. People with this condition are typically more prone to infections than others, since their immune system is compromised, and may also have headaches, night sweats, and unexplained weight loss. It's important to treat this condition quickly, since it can easily spread throughout the system and become fatal. Treatment generally consists of chemotherapy or radiation.

**Lymphatic Drainage Therapy**

LDT consists of specific movements that are used to lightly push lymph through the system, helping it to drain out of the tissues and move throughout the body. This treatment is commonly used to help with lymphedema, which can be caused by heart problems, wearing tight-fitting clothing, and injuries like sprains and fractures. It also sometimes happens as side effect of chemotherapy treatments and surgeries done to remove breast cancer, colon cancer, and prostate cancer. During an LDT session, a massage therapist gently presses and moves his or her hands along the body in specified directions. For instance, if a person's arms and legs are swollen, then the massage therapist may rub both sides of his or her neck with a downward motion.

Though this treatment can be very helpful, it's generally not suitable for people with certain types of cancer, since it could encourage the cancer to spread throughout the body; as well as those with serious heart disease or circulatory problems, serious infections, or internal bleeding. Some massage therapists still do lymphatic drainage with people with these conditions, but may only work with one part of the body instead of all of it. This treatment is generally used together with other treatments, like exercising to promote circulation, compression therapy, anti-inflammatory drugs, and ice packs. People can also learn to do it at home, but should only be trained by a medical massage therapist and should only do it after speaking to a healthcare provider to prevent any complications.