

Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD) - Lower Extremity (Leg) Home Program

Here are instructions on how to do manual lymphatic drainage to help remove swelling from your lower extremity (leg).

Things to know about MLD

- Use only gentle pressure, just enough to see your skin move.
- Move the skin in half circles (“rainbow” shape strokes) then let the skin return to the starting position. Each stroke should take about 1 second.
- MLD should not be painful.
- Do not rub your skin until it becomes red.
- Perform MLD each day.
- MLD should take about 30 minutes.
- Repeat each of the following MLD steps 5 to 10 times.

How to do MLD of your lower extremity

It is important to only do MLD if you have been told to do so by your physical therapist. Your physical therapist will teach you how to do this at home.

- 1. Trunk:** Abdominal (belly) breathing: Breathe in (inhale) so your belly expands and rises. Breathe out (exhale) to deflate your belly and draw your belly button in towards your spine. Exhale all of the way.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

2. Use 3 fingers to gently stretch the skin over the lymph nodes in the hollow just above the collar bone, where your neck and shoulders meet. Stretch the skin in a semi-circle, moving towards your neck. Do this on both sides.

3. ____ IF CHECKED BY YOUR THERAPIST:

Pump the lymph nodes in each of your armpits. To pump the lymph nodes, use the flat surface of your fingers to gently press into your armpit and move the tissue in a circular direction.

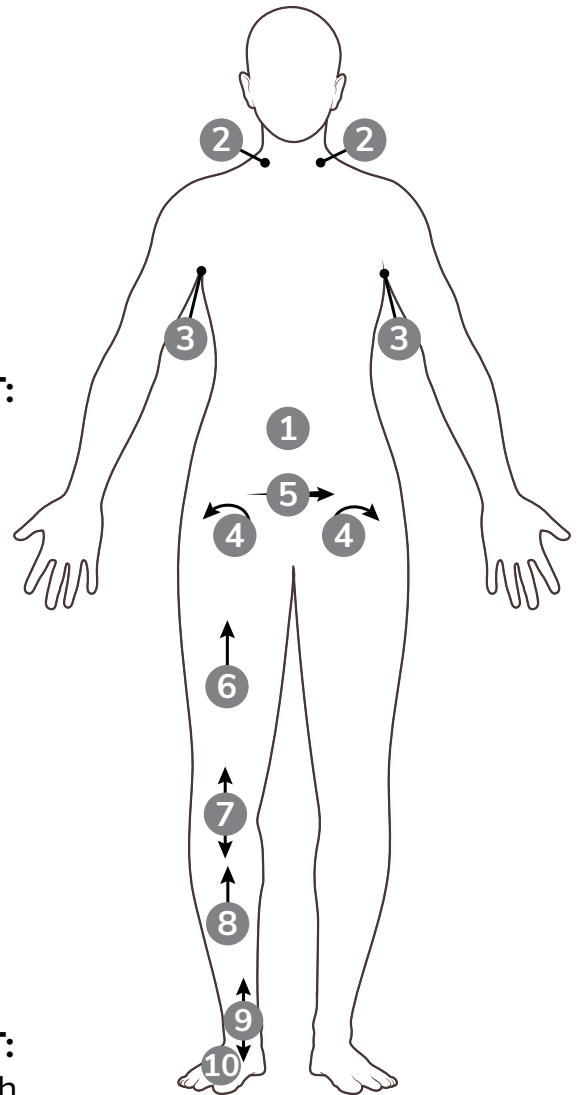
4. Place your hand on the top of your thigh with your thumb near the fold where your leg joins the body. Move/stretch the skin in a half circle (“rainbow” shape stroke) up and out toward the side of your leg.

5. ____ IF CHECKED BY YOUR THERAPIST:

Use the flat surface of your hand to stretch the skin across your abdomen from the top of your swollen leg to the top of your non-swollen (or less swollen) leg.

6. **Thigh:** Use the flat part of your hand to move/stretch the skin on your thigh toward your trunk. Do this on the upper part of your thigh, then the middle of your thigh and then just above your knee. Always move/stretch the skin upward, toward the trunk.

7. **Knee:** Use the flat surface of your hand to move/stretch the skin in a rainbow stroke on the front and side of your knee. Start below the knee and work upward toward the thigh. Next, bend your knee slightly and use the flat surface of your fingers to gently massage the area on the back of your leg behind the knee.



- 8. Shin/Calf:** Use the flat surface of your hand to move/stretch the skin on the front of your lower leg from ankle to knee; using a rainbow stroke. Use the flat surface of your hand to move/stretch the skin on the back of the calf. Start at the ankle and move up toward the knee.
- 9. Ankle:** Use the flat surface of your hand to move/stretch the skin on the front of your ankle crease in a rainbow stroke. Use your thumbs or 2 fingers and make upward circles over each side of the ankle, like you are moving fluid around the ankle bones.
- 10. Foot:** Again, with thumbs or 2 fingers start at the base of the toes and make circles toward the ankle.
- 11. End with more deep breathing:** Take 2 abdominal (belly) breathes to end the manual lymphatic drainage (MLD).
12. Put a low pH lotion (pH level 4 to 6; such as Eucerin) on your leg.
13. Put on any compression bandages to the affected leg.