

***Top Five Benefits of
Lymphatic Drainage
for Post Surgical
Recovery***

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P R E S S O

Kia ora and Hello from New Zealand, the home of Flowpresso®

Thank you for downloading our complementary guide to the Top Five Benefits of Lymphatic Drainage in Post-Surgical Recovery.

Here you will unlock the benefits of lymphatic drainage and how this can enhance recovery after surgery. You'll also find our top tips for manual lymphatic drainage. As we uncover an array of benefits, allow yourself to be inspired and challenged with a revitalized, non-invasive approach to recovery.

Let's dive right in and unpack the expansive benefits of lymphatic drainage for those recovering from surgery.

WHAT IS LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE?

Lymphatic drainage is the process of stimulating the lymphatic system to encourage the movement of lymph fluid throughout the body. The lymphatic system, a crucial part of the immune system, is responsible for removing waste, toxins, and excess fluids from tissues and transporting them to the bloodstream for elimination.

THE BENEFITS

Healthcare practitioners have been using lymphatic drainage techniques such as massage, skincare, and exercises since the late 1800s.


Lymphatic drainage is known to:

- Reduce swelling and fluid retention
- Boost the immune system by supporting lymph flow
- Detoxify the body by removing waste products
- Improve circulation and promote relaxation
- Assist in healing and recovery post-surgery or injury

As technology evolves and medical practices change, however, we often forget to incorporate simple, supportive techniques to stimulate movement in the lymphatic system and allow our bodies to heal.



The Top Five Benefits of Lymphatic Drainage After Surgery

1. Reduce pain and swelling
 2. Reduce scarring
 3. Enhance mobility
 4. Improve recovery times
 5. Aid in the prevention of lymphoedema
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1. Reduce Pain and Swelling

After surgery, the body's natural healing process can cause fluid accumulation (edema) and inflammation in the affected area, resulting in swelling and discomfort. Lymphatic drainage plays a vital role in reducing post-surgical pain and swelling by stimulating lymph flow and promoting the removal of excess fluid from the swollen tissues. By enhancing lymphatic circulation, it helps to minimize the buildup of interstitial fluid (fluid between cells), reducing swelling and accelerating the healing process.

Swelling and fluid retention often put pressure on surrounding nerves and tissues, contributing to pain and discomfort. By reducing fluid accumulation, lymphatic drainage alleviates this pressure, leading to a significant reduction in pain. Additionally, it can activate the parasympathetic nervous system, promoting relaxation and lowering pain sensitivity.

The accumulation of lymph fluid post-surgery can also trigger an inflammatory response as the body reacts to tissue damage. By helping to clear this excess fluid, lymphatic drainage reduces inflammation, further contributing to decreased pain levels and a smoother recovery.

2. Reduce Scarring

Surgeries often result in the formation of scar tissue, which, if left untreated, can become rigid and uncomfortable, sometimes even restricting movement. Increasing circulation and promoting fluid movement in the affected area can help improve both the appearance and formation of scars. Studies have shown that regular lymphatic drainage plays a key role in preventing excessive scar formation by enhancing lymph flow and promoting tissue healing.

A study by Zhang et al. (2016) followed breast cancer patients after a modified radical mastectomy and found that those who performed self-manual lymphatic drainage on the surgical incision site three times a day for 30 days post-surgery experienced significant improvements in both scar contracture and upper limb circumference, demonstrating that lymphatic drainage techniques are effective in preventing scar formation and promoting better recovery outcomes.

3. Enhance Mobility

Lymphatic drainage can play a key role in improving mobility post-surgery by reducing swelling, alleviating pain, and promoting tissue healing. After surgery, fluid accumulation (edema) and inflammation can restrict movement and cause discomfort in the affected area. By stimulating the lymphatic system, lymphatic drainage encourages the removal of excess fluid and waste products, relieving pressure on surrounding tissues and joints. This reduction in swelling helps restore range of motion, making it easier for patients to move freely. Additionally, improved circulation supports tissue repair, further aiding in mobility and speeding up recovery.

Ebert et al. (2013) investigated the efficacy of manual lymphatic drainage post-surgery after total knee arthroplasty (knee replacement surgery) to reduce swelling and pain and improve knee range of motion. The group using lymphatic drainage techniques showed significantly greater active knee flexion than the control group, indicating that combining conventional care and lymphatic drainage in the early postoperative stages can improve mobility. Integrating lymphatic drainage into post-surgical care can lead to a smoother return to normal physical activity.


4. Improve Recovery Times

Lymphatic drainage helps speed up recovery times post-surgery by enhancing the body's natural healing processes. After surgery, swelling, inflammation, and fluid accumulation can slow down recovery and contribute to discomfort. Lymphatic drainage stimulates the lymphatic system, encouraging the removal of excess fluid, cellular waste, and toxins from the body and enhancing circulation. This increased circulation delivers more oxygen and nutrients to the damaged tissues, accelerating their repair and helping patients recover more quickly.

For instance, a study by O'Connell et al. (2015) explored the effects of lymphatic drainage on patients recovering from abdominal surgeries, including hernia repairs and bowel resections. The researchers found that patients who received lymphatic drainage therapy postoperatively experienced significantly less swelling and reported a reduction in pain levels compared to those who did not receive this treatment. Moreover, these patients demonstrated a faster return to normal activities and reduced hospital stays.

This example highlights how lymphatic drainage can significantly speed up recovery times and improve patient outcomes when combined with standard postoperative care.

5. Aid in the Prevention of Lymphoedema

Lymphoedema is a chronic condition marked by the accumulation of lymphatic fluid in tissues, leading to localized swelling. This occurs when the lymphatic system is compromised - either damaged or obstructed - disrupting the normal drainage of lymph fluid. While it most commonly affects the arms or legs, it can manifest in various other parts of the body. 

Given that lymphoedema has no definitive cure, preventative measures are critical, especially in patients who undergo surgeries that involve lymph node dissection or radiation therapy. The lymphatic system is highly sensitive, and surgical procedures - particularly those removing lymph nodes - can overwhelm the remaining lymphatic vessels, leading to impaired fluid regulation and the development of edema, which can evolve into full-blown lymphoedema.

Research underscores the role of lymphatic drainage therapy as a preventive strategy post-surgery. Lymphatic drainage promotes the removal of interstitial fluid by stimulating lymphatic movement and enhancing lymph flow, improving the system's resorptive capacity without exacerbating filtration. This therapeutic intervention enhances the lymphatic system's ability to manage excess fluid, thus mitigating the risk of fluid retention and subsequent tissue swelling.

A notable study by Zimmermann et al. (2012) involving women who had undergone surgery for primary breast cancer demonstrated that those who received manual lymphatic drainage immediately post-operation, followed by fortnightly treatments over six months, did not experience a statistically significant increase in arm volume compared to the control group. These findings suggest that lymphatic drainage can be an effective preventive measure against the onset of lymphoedema in at-risk patients following surgery, allowing for improved patient outcomes and quality of life.



INCORPORATING LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE THERAPY INTO RECOVERY

Lymphatic drainage can be incorporated into post-surgical recovery plans at different stages of the recovery journey. It is essential to consult with all treating practitioners and seek support from an experienced therapist to ensure the best and safest results.

FLOWPRESSO® – A GAME CHANGER FOR LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE THERAPY

Flowpresso® is a lymphatic drainage suit designed to mimic the gentle massage of manual lymphatic drainage through compression and deep pressure therapy technology. The sequential nature of the inflating pieces is similar to the process in which a therapist would work their way up the body. Flowpresso® also has the added benefit of incorporating heat therapy to support blood circulation and comfort while also being a non-invasive tailored treatment. Email diane@flowpressousa.com if you'd like to learn more about the benefits of incorporating Flowpresso ® into your clinical offering.

TOP TIPS FOR MANUAL LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE

Lymphatic drainage is not limited to gentle massage techniques. There are many approaches that most people do every day without knowing it!

Get Moving

The lymphatic system moves with muscle expansion and contraction, only moving as much as you do. Exercise ensures the lymphatic system flows properly. There are plenty of budget-friendly ways to help stir up your lymph and prevent stagnation. These include walking, yoga, bicycle rides, stairs, swimming, and even rocking chairs (great for our seniors).

The more you move your body, the more your body moves your lymph.

Breathe

Deep breathing is a well-known stress reliever with many health benefits. It is reported that diaphragmatic breathing creates a vacuum effect that increases the rate of toxic elimination through the lymph as much as 15 times the standard rate.

Remember to take slow, deep breaths throughout your day.

Hydrate

It is important to drink enough water to keep the lymph fluid clean and flowing freely. When we don't, we are unable to remove the cellular waste.

Think of it this way: water needs to move and circulate! When it flows, water tends to clean itself. When water stagnates, it gets impure.

It is also a myth that drinking water increases edema issues; drinking less will actually encourage the body to hold onto fluid as a survival mechanism. If we don't provide the water it needs, it will hold on to what it has!

TOP TIPS FOR MANUAL LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE CONTINUED...

Dry Skin Brush

Dry skin brushing is a form of self-care that stimulates the skin, supporting the circulation of the blood and lymphatic systems.

Dry skin brushing is done on dry skin before showering, and your sweeps are directed towards the heart. The strokes should be enough to create a tingling sensation but not a raw red mark.

A brushing session results in a feeling of lightness or increased physical well-being, and your skin will love you for it as it removes dead pores, improving skin quality.

Nutrition

Your nutrition can either support or hinder your lymphatic system.

Raw fruits and vegetables are rich in enzymes and acids, which are powerful lymph cleansers. Anti-inflammatory foods, such as berries, citrus fruits, leafy greens, cruciferous vegetables, and fatty fish, are beneficial as they reduce inflammation and support the lymphatic system's ability to drain fluids and remove toxins.

By being mindful of the types of foods you are nourishing yourself with, you can help prepare your body to prevent or fight unknown battles.

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