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Move your lymph and thrive



Paolo Mascagni, Tab. XXIV

Your lymph system. (From *Vasorum Lymphaticorum Corporis Humani Historia et*

I thought after taking all those biology classes with their brightly-illustrated textbooks, that I knew what was inside me. Easy. Bones and muscles and organs and blood vessels. But now I find out, there's more. And although I knew about lymph glands - those things on your neck that get swollen when you have a really sore throat - for some reason, I didn't really know that inside me (and you too) there was a network of lymph vessels similar to and as intricate as the ones that carry blood.

And this lymph, it collects crap from all over your body and carries it to the lymph nodes which clean it up and then sends it back out to bathe your cells and collect more crap. The crap I'm talking about includes bacteria, viruses, fats, dead cells, waste products, proteins and fluid. So if this system is sluggish, the fluid isn't getting clean and your cells aren't being bathed which can make you sluggish. And puffy. And sick. And yes, uglier even.

So it's in your best interest to get that lymph moving.

Although this concept is pretty new for many of us in America, it's not new to Europeans who use and prescribe it as a regular course of treatment. One lymph moving technique developed by French physician Bruno Chikly is called Lymphatic Drainage Therapy

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Ichnographia, 1787. Courtesy of the Health Sciences Library, University of Washington.

(LDT). (Because it started in France, "drainage" is pronounced "Drain-aahge" like massage.) Fabulously

glamorous sounding, no?

Many of our top spas like [International Orange](#), [Therapeia](#) and [The Claremont](#) are incorporating various techniques for lymph drainage in their beauty offerings. Bliss Spa offers a treatment called high thighs, "a radical anti-cellulite treatment which incorporates a dose of lymphatic drainage, our exclusive toxin-tackling orange peel skin-wringing rub."

But there are also several independent massage therapists in the SF Bay Area who use Chikly's LDT both alone and in conjunction with other techniques like deep tissue, craniosacral therapy and visceral manipulation (which works with the organs). (Note to self: Must try this too.)

Because most of the lymphatic vessels are just below the skin, the practitioner uses light, slow strokes to mimic the rhythm of the lymph going through the vessels. Each stroke encourages drainage of fluid and waste. In its most acute application, LDT is used to help patients who have undergone chemotherapy or other surgeries and are dealing with severe edema and lymphedemas. It is also used for general detoxification, stimulation of the immune system, relief of chronic inflammation, and anti-aging effects among others.

I was happy to try it out with practitioner and teacher [Lisa Mazzocut](#) whom I had seen before at [Elephant Pharmacy](#) doing a self-care demonstration in lymphatic drainage.

Mazzocut starts by laying all the scientific, physiological data on me - about interstitial fluid and ventricles and the nervous system and spinal fluid and hormone delivery. She says she can talk science like no one else but despite that she describes her experience as "very spiritual and deep."

"You are working with the core rhythms of the body. And even though it is science, I'm in pursuit of the magic. There's a certain [place] you reach holding someone's body."

One of the main benefits of any kind of massage is relaxation or stress relief. Stress, as we all know by now, is killing us in all kinds of ways, and anything you can do to counteract its effects is a good thing.

I can definitely attest to the power of LDT for relaxation. Mazzocut started by holding and touching the "listening stations" - at my feet, my stomach, my neck, then she moved on to the clavicle area where the main lymph nodes are and cleared that area as well as down my neck in the "horizontal circle" and at the back of my head at the occipital base. Almost immediately, my analytical brain began winding down and I nodded off to sleep. I drifted awake as she massaged my liver and spent some time working on my ilium (the pelvic bowl) where the lymph also congregates.

"Relaxation is about relaxing the brain. It's a challenge for all of us: how do you soothe yourself?" says Mazzocut. "A lymph massage puts you in a parasympathetic state where your body functions differently. It creates long-term changes in your cells. This isn't like you relax and leave and get tense again. You go into a deep state and stay relaxed. It trains people - people learn how to be that way more."

Afterwards, I did feel very relaxed and peaceful. I was still relaxed a day later. Is that because of the body work? Or just a random state of grace? I don't know. Mazzocut also said I should drink a lot of water to flush out the toxins, and I've read accounts of people releasing fluid - but I experienced no such thing.

Although Mazzocut has been a licensed massage therapist for 10 years doing traditional massage, she now prefers LDT's gentler approach. "[Traditional] massage is a 'doing to,'" she says, "The holistic or osteopathic view is that you're tuning into the body, palpating it to the best of your ability, helping the body's nervous system and stimulating the lymphatic system to contract on its own."

All the practitioners I spoke with talked about helping people help themselves. As

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RavenLight, a local practitioner, said, "I don't want to fix folks. My job is to help them to be healthy. I unclog places and get them to keep it flowing."

But for those of us used to being prodded and pummeled, it does make you wonder, "Is there anything really happening here?" When I asked if she could feel the lymph moving, RavenLight said, "I can feel it with the pads of my fingers. When I touch lightly, I feel a gentle pull - like waves. It's rhythmic."

Another local practitioner, Dusa Althea Rammessirsingh, said, "I've seen swelling go down immediately. I've also been giving a massage and trying lots of stuff that's not working and done a few light strokes and seen immediate results." She does LDT in conjunction with other practices which she says are all related: "There is so much depth in every system of the body. And every system affects other systems indirectly. Everything affects everything else."

As for me, I made another appointment. I've heard a lot about the benefits and plus it does feel good. I'm willing to see what it does for me. Besides, all the practitioners were awesome to talk to: very grounded and serious about the physiology with a quality I can only describe as spiritual, healing and soothing. (And they have full-time massage practices which they've pretty much built through word of mouth so there must be something good going on.)

Lisa Mazzocut, LMT
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510-981-0286
www.jumpstartmassage.com/lymph

Lisa's upcoming events:

>July 23, Sunday 3:00 - 4:30 pm 'Cleanse & Rejuvenate' at Elephant Pharmacy - Free.
>August 7, Monday 7:00 - 8:30 pm 'Lymphatic Breast Health' at Elephant Pharmacy - Free.
>September 10, Sunday 9:30 - 5:30 pm 'Lymphatic Drainage Therapy Overview' at The Rosen Center Berkeley, Tuition, 6 CEUs

(Lisa says, "It was meant to be an introduction for practitioners but I've discovered it's really more of an intro for lay people. Anyone can do this for themselves.")

RavenLight LMT, CST
Raven-light.com
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Posted By: [Amy Moon](#) (Email) | July 17 2006 at 06:00 PM

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