

Patient information

How to do self-lymphatic massage on your head and neck

What to avoid

- Do not strain your shoulders, neck, arm or hand
- Do not self-massage in a way that causes pain
- Do not continue self-massage if it is causing you pain
- Do not self-massage if you have an infection in that area

Important: Do not do self-massage if you have an infection in your head or neck. Signs of infection may include:

- Swelling in these areas and redness of the skin (this redness can quickly spread)
- Feeling pain in the head and/or neck
- Feeling tenderness and/or warmth in the head/neck
- Having a fever or chills and feeling unwell

If you have an infection or think you have an infection, go to:

- Your GP
- Walk in centre
- Urgent care clinic
- Emergency department
- NHS 111 out of hours service

You will require x2 weeks of double strength antibiotics, as per the British Lymphology Society guidelines, available at:

<https://www.lymphoedema.org/images/pdf/cellulitisconsensus.pdf>

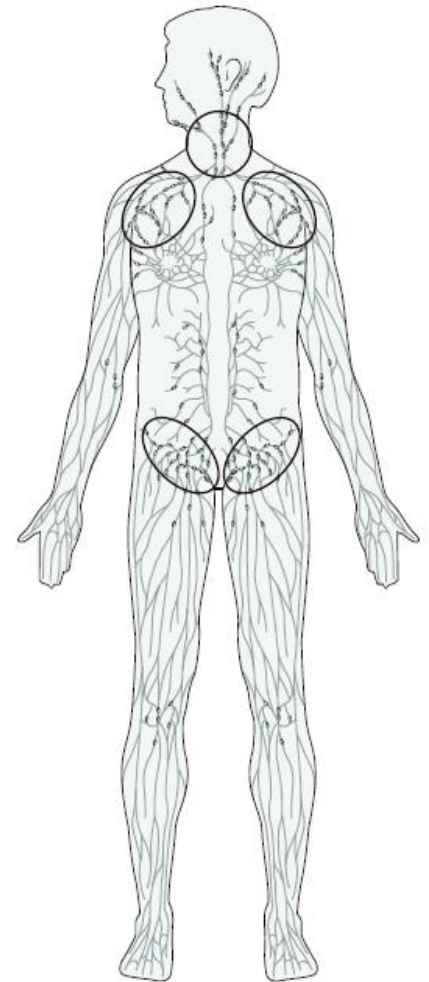
What is the lymphatic system?

Your lymphatic system removes fluid build-up and waste from your body and plays an important role in your immune function. It is made up of lymph nodes that are connected by lymph vessels.

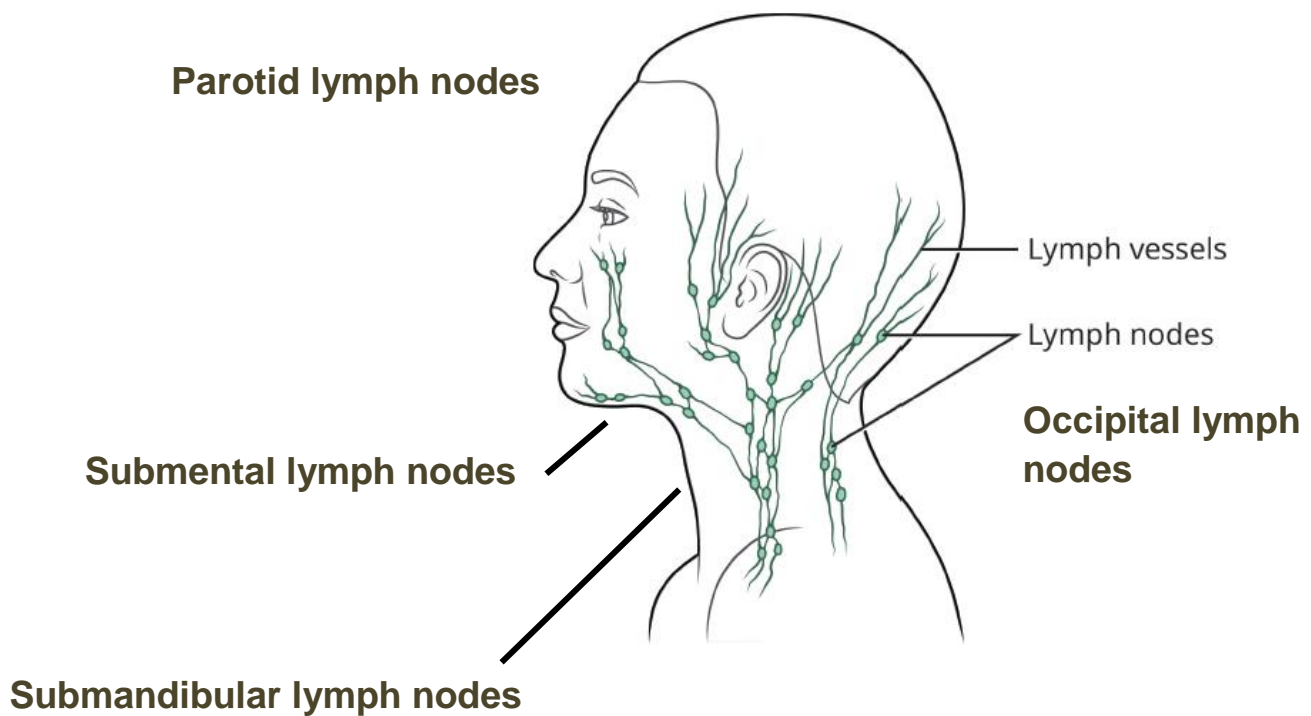
Large groups or chains of lymph nodes can be found in your neck, under your arms and in your groin (see picture to the right).

How does self-massage help with lymphoedema?

Self-lymph drainage, or SLD, is a special type of gentle massage that helps move extra fluid from an area that is swollen (or is at risk of becoming swollen), into an area where the lymph nodes are working properly. This is done by stimulating contractions of lymphatic vessels.



The anatomy of the lymphatic system in the head and neck



The normal flow of lymphatic fluid in the head and neck.



Instructions for doing self-massage

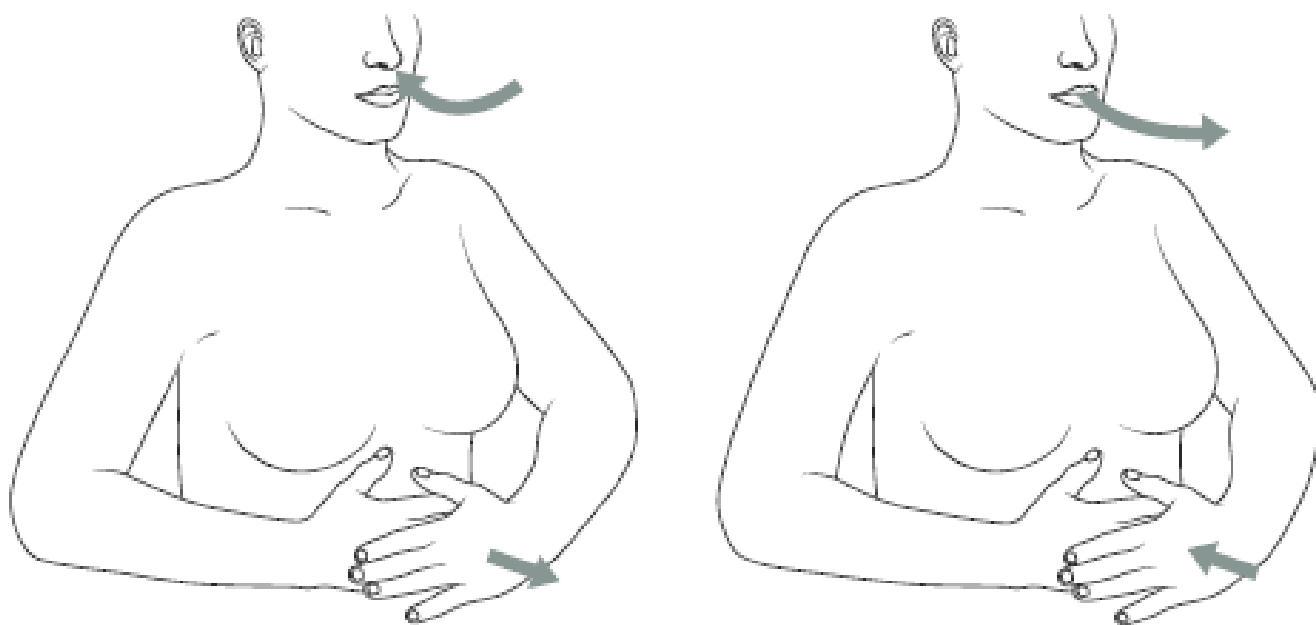
- Use a light pressure and keep your hands soft and relaxed. The pressure of your hands on your skin should be just enough to gently stretch the skin as far as it naturally goes, and then releasing. If you can feel your muscles underneath your fingers, then you are pressing too hard.
- Use the flats of your hands instead of your fingertips. This allows more contact with the skin to stimulate the lymph vessels
- Massage towards areas of your body that have not been affected with lymphoedema.
- Try to do the massage when you are comfortably warm because your muscles will be more flexible.
- Make sure you are comfortable while doing the massage. You can try a seated, standing or lying down position.
- Try to do self-massage every day.
- If you need to do the massage on both sides of your body, start on one side of your body and go through each step. Once you have completed the steps on one side, repeat them on the other side of your body.

Try different ways to make self-massage a part of your routine. Some people prefer to do self-massage while they are watching TV or having a shower so that it does not take time away from their day. Other people prefer to use self-massage as time for themselves or as part of their relaxation routine.

1. Stimulate your lymphatic system with deep breathing

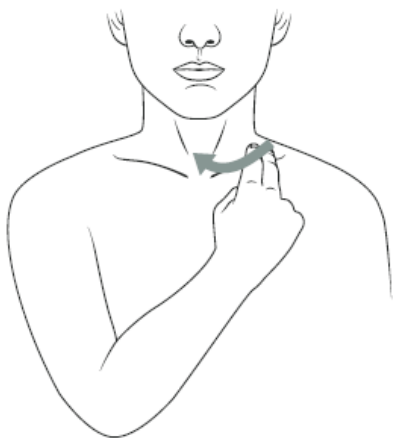
A very important part of your self-care is deep breathing. Deep breathing helps to stimulate lymphatic system in your whole body. You can practice deep breathing anytime!

- Place the palms/flats of your hands on your stomach
- Slowly, breathe in deeply through your nose, and let your stomach expand
- Breathe out slowly through pursed lips, and let your stomach flatten
- Repeat 5 times. Take a short rest between each breath so you do not get dizzy



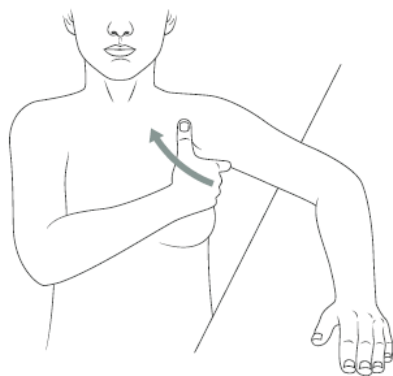
2. Prepare your lymph nodes BEFORE Massage

This step prepares the lymph nodes that sit just above your collarbone and your underarm to take in lymph fluid from your face and neck during massage.



- Place the flats of your 2nd and 3rd fingers on either side of your neck, just above your collarbone. Do a shoulder shrug up and feel the dip in the skin. This is the correct position.
- Massage down and inwards towards your collarbone. Always keep your fingers above your collarbone. Gently stretch the skin just as far as it naturally goes and release.
- This massage will look like two “J” strokes facing one another.
- Repeat 15 times.

You can massage one side at a time or both sides at the same time. Cross your hands if you are doing both at the same time.



Place your arm in a comfortable position slightly elevated and supported. If needed, try placing your arm on an armrest or table for comfort.

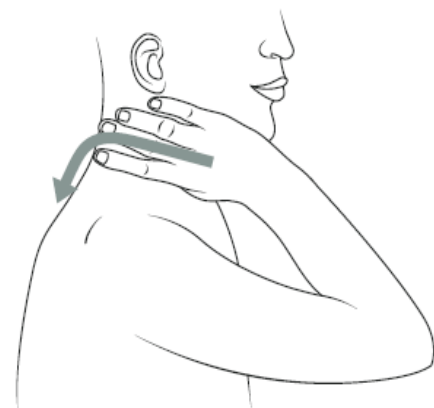
- Place your palm against your underarm
- Gently pull up and in towards your body, then release
- Repeat 10 to 15 times.
- Repeat this action on your other underarm

Tip: This can also be done using a soft ball, rolled up flannel or hand towel and pumping your arm against your chest wall.

3. Stretch and release the skin at the side of your neck

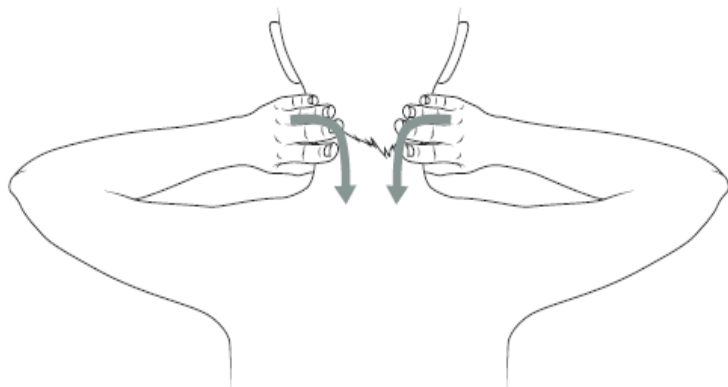
You can massage one side at a time, or do both sides together.

- Place your flat hands on either side of your neck, just under your ears
- Gently stretch the skin back (away from your face) and down, then release
- Try to massage your neck in a slow, gentle way, following a rhythm
- Repeat 10 to 15 times



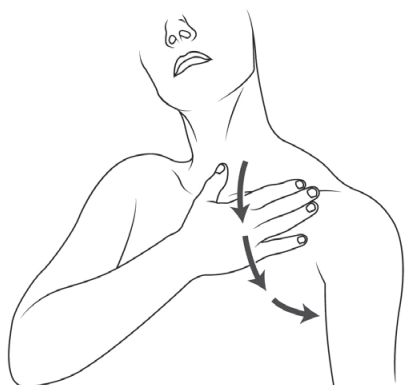
Remember: Keep your pressure light.

4. Stretch and release the skin on the back of your neck



- Place your flat hands on the back of your neck, just below your hairline on either side of your spine
- Stretch the skin towards your spine and then down towards the base of your neck and release
- Repeat 10 - 15 times

5. Stretch and release the skin from your upper chest downwards away from the head and neck



- Place your hand on your collarbone. Move your hand down toward your underarm. This massage will move the lymph fluid from your neck and chest to your underarm lymph nodes.
- Gently stretch the skin (not muscles) down your chest and towards your underarm. Then let go of the skin.
- Repeat this massage 10 - 15 times.

6. Massage your scar

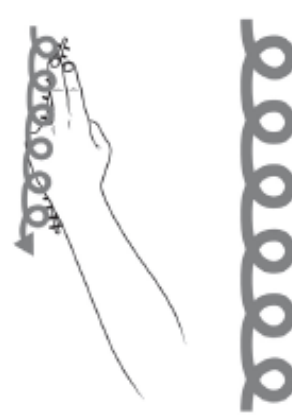
Massage your scar. This massage is only if you have had surgery. Do not massage until three weeks after surgery. Do not massage until all staples and clips have been removed. Your scar may feel very sensitive, tight or itchy. Scar massage will help reduce these feelings.

This massage helps soften the scar and allows better blood flow to the area. You should not experience pain when massaging your scar.

Zigzag motion



Circle motion



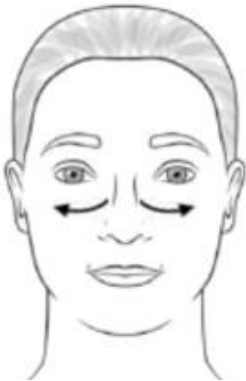
- Place the palm of your hand over the scar
- Move up and down in a zigzag pattern or circle pattern along the scar (as above)
- Apply firm but gentle pressure whilst moving along the scar - try to move the skin, if possible lift the skin along the scar
- Repeat 5 times along the scar
- Now place your fingertips just above the scar and gently stretch the skin away from the scar and release. Repeat this action 5 times.
- Place your fingertips below the scar, gently stretching the skin away from the scar, and releasing. Repeat 5 times.

Tip: Do not use oil while doing the scar massage. Apply any lotions or oils after the massage.

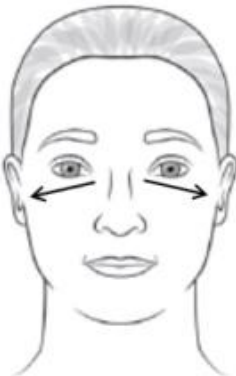
7. Massage for face swelling



- Stroke above and below your lips finishing in front of your ears where your side burns are

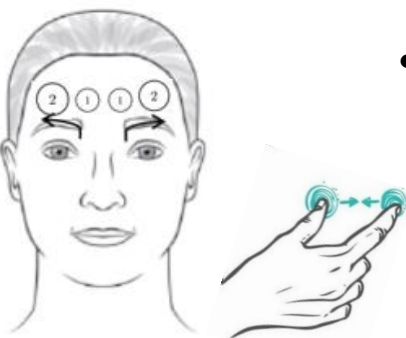


- Stroke from bridge of nose outwards across your cheeks finishing in front of your ears. Start at the tip of your nose.

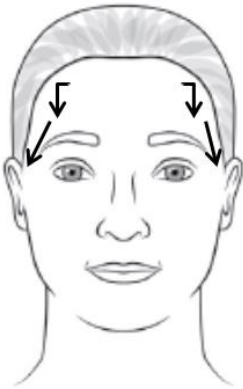


- As above working upwards towards your eyes, being careful not to press too hard around the eye area

Peri-auricular lymph nodes

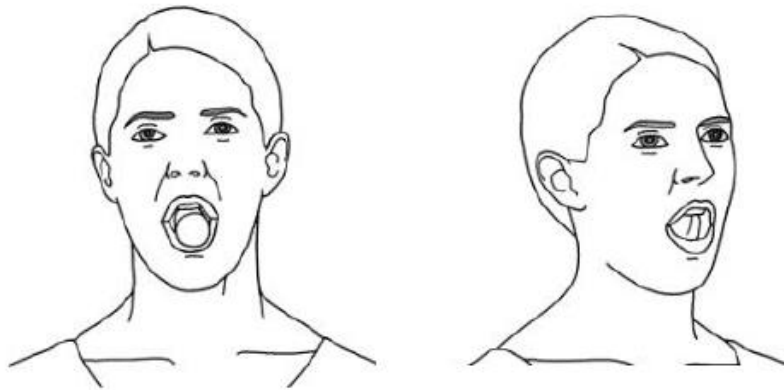


- Lightly pinch the eyebrows, starting from the inner brow moving outwards to the outer eyebrows to facilitate lymphatic drainage towards the peri-auricular lymph nodes in front of your ears



- Stretch the skin from the outer forehead, working down to your sideburns.

8. Massage for swelling inside the mouth



Tip: Do not massage inside your mouth if you have got any sores, cuts or pains.

Ensure hands are clean.

You can use an electric toothbrush to assist in massaging the inside of your mouth but remember to keep the pressure light.

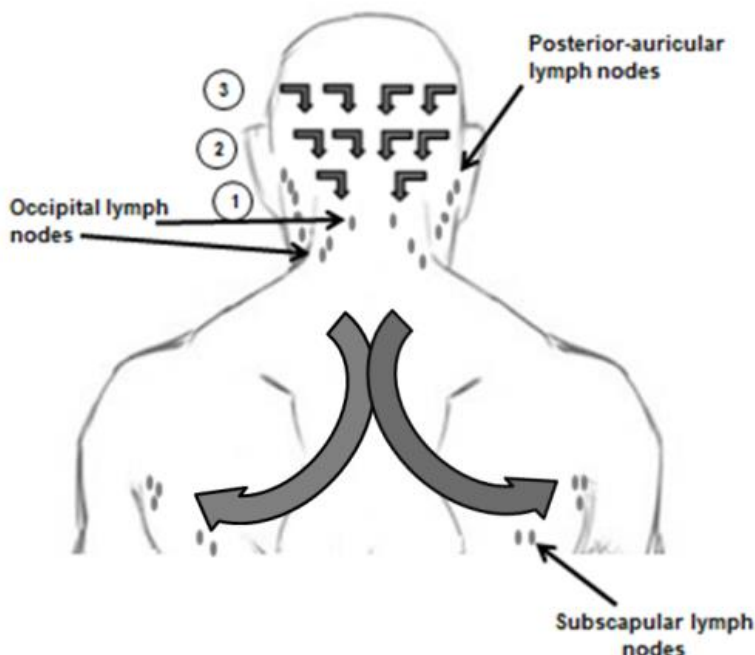
A good exercise for assisting in facial swelling is to try and stretch your mouth open wide. You can do this whilst pronouncing "A, E, I, O, U".

Do not stretch your mouth wide open if it is painful.

9. Massage for the back of the head

Gently stretch the skin from the outer back of the head down towards the neck. Follow the numbered diagram above starting at number 1. Then continue to stretch the skin at the level of number 2, then 3 (see next page).

Repeat each row x3 then stroke down to armpit across the central shoulder blades, following the large arrows above.



Contact information

If you have questions about self-lymphatic massage, please contact the Lymphoedema Clinic:

Telephone: Landline: **01284 712732** – the answerphone is monitored regularly so please leave a message if there is no answer

E-mail: wsh-tr.wslymphoedemaservice@nhs.net

Original Authors of this Modified Patient Leaflet: Cancer Rehabilitation and Survivorship Program at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre in Toronto, Canada



If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (the new name for DisabledGo)
<https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust>



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