



ALL ABOUT LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE

These resources were created in conjunction with Sophia White, CLWT-LANA, who presented on the topic during the 2025 FOP Family Gathering. This information is provided for educational and informational purposes only and does not constitute providing medical advice, training, or professional services. The information provided should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease, and those seeking personal medical advice should consult with a licensed physician. Always seek the advice of your doctor or other qualified healthcare provider regarding your medical condition.

WHAT IS THE LYMPHATIC SYSTEM?

Your lymphatic system is a network of organs, vessels, and tissues that work together to move lymph, a colorless, watery fluid, back into your circulatory system, also known as your bloodstream.

As a vital part of your immune system, your lymphatic system protects you from infection and destroys old or abnormal cells your body doesn't need. Lymphatic system functions also include maintaining normal fluid levels in your body and absorbing fats and fat-soluble vitamins so they can make their way into your bloodstream.

WHAT IS LYMPHATIC THERAPY?

Lymphatic therapy is the process of gently stretching the skin using manual techniques to support fluid movement in the body. Lymphatic therapy is not the same as massage and does not focus on muscle manipulation. Lymphatic therapy uses minimal pressure to promote circulation and reduce swelling. For people with FOP, working with a certified lymphedema therapist can help reduce inflammation and pain.

SAFETY & LYMPHATIC THERAPY

Always consult your local healthcare provider and FOP expert before beginning lymphatic therapy and ensure your therapist is properly trained. Sessions should be adjusted based on flare status, patient comfort, and tolerance. Any techniques that could risk trauma to tissue should be avoided. Never have lymphatic therapy or perform self-lymphatic drainage if you have a fever, infection, blood clot, uncontrolled heart or kidney failure, or are currently undergoing cancer treatment without proper medical clearance. It's a good idea to keep a journal of your response to lymphatic therapy so you can track how you are responding to the treatment.

HOW TO FIND A LYMPHEDEMA THERAPIST

Certified lymphedema therapists, or CLTs, are healthcare professionals like nurses, doctors, physical therapists, occupational therapists, or massage therapists who have completed additional training in lymphatic therapy and passed a board exam. **Whoever you choose to work with should always consult your healthcare provider or FOP expert prior to beginning any treatment.** To view a list of search engines that can be used to find a CLT in your area, visit ifopa.org/lymphatic-drainage-resources.

HOW TO DO SELF-LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE

With the approval of your healthcare professional, self-lymphatic drainage can be done at home. This can be done between sessions with your certified lymphedema therapist or in the event you cannot find a therapist in your area. Always use **feather-light pressure** when performing self-lymphatic drainage. **The skin should just move, never redden.**

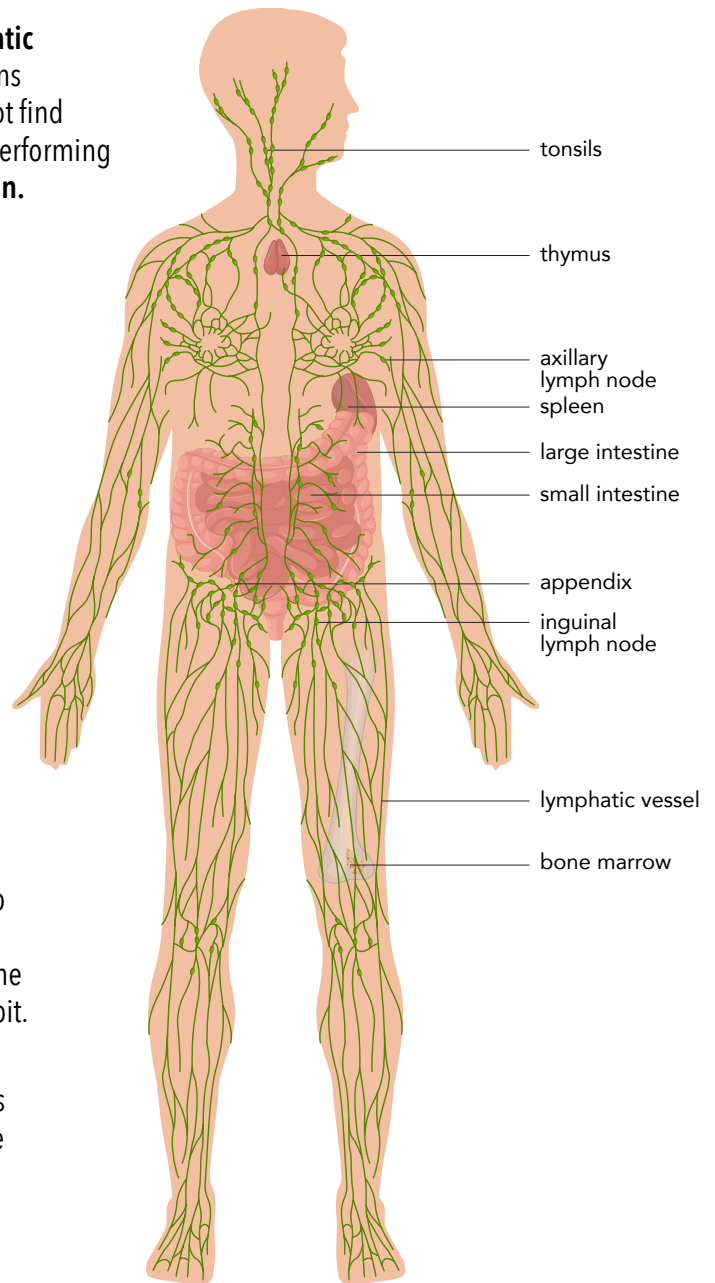
Before you start

Sit or stand tall and relax your shoulders. Take 3 slow belly breaths (inhale through the nose so the belly rises, exhale slowly).

- 1 Start the Drain - Collarbone**
Place flat fingers just above the collarbones. Make tiny outward circles or gentle 'in-and-release' stretches toward the hollow above the collarbone. Repeat 10 times on each side. This opens the main lymph outlets.
- 2 Side of Neck - Collarbone**
Place fingers on the side of the neck under the ear/jaw. Glide with a soft stretch down toward the collarbone, then release and reset higher. Work the whole side of the neck in sections, 5-10 strokes per section on both sides.
- 3 Armpit Area - Upper Body Pathway**
Slide your hand high into the armpit. Do gentle pumps up and inward toward the armpit, then light sweeps from the upper arm/shoulder toward the armpit. Do 10 pumps in the armpit, then 5-10 sweeps from the upper arm to the armpit.
- 4 Belly - Lower Trunk**
Rest a hand on the lower belly. Take 3-5 slow belly breaths again (belly rises on inhale, softens on exhale). Then make gentle skin stretches on the lower belly toward the groin - right to right, left to left, 5-10 times per side.

Tips

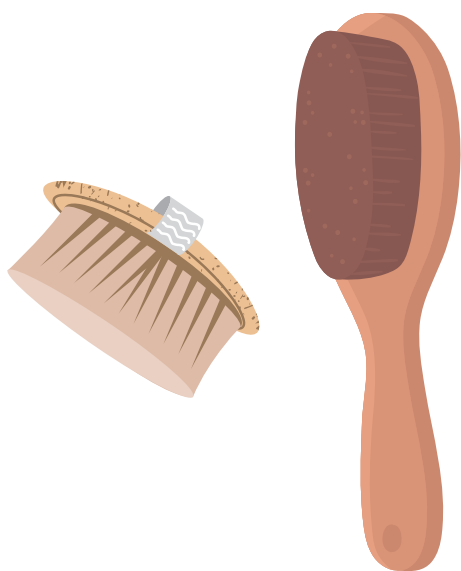
- » Slow rhythm: 1-2 seconds per stretch, then release
- » Always aim toward nearby nodes (collarbone, armpit, groin)
- » Total session: 5-10 minutes, once or twice daily
- » If one arm/area is swollen, still prepare both sides by using the slow rhythm strokes on both the affected and unaffected sides. This helps to open up the drainage pathways before directing fluid away from the congested area.



“My acupuncturist had mentioned lymphatic drainage to me. I didn’t think he could have any treatment, but she suggested I ask his doctor because lymphatic drainage is very light and gentle. It’s not like a regular massage. The touch is so light it gives you goose bumps.

In our bodies, the heart pumps the blood, but our lymphatic system has no pump. The only way to get lymphatic fluid moving is through movement, swimming, or lymphatic drainage. After I learned this, I contacted his doctor, and he gave the green light. I am over the moon to share the difference we see in Trent. It’s absolutely incredible.”

Kim Biro, mom to Trent, who lives with FOP in Canada and works with a certified lymphedema therapist



DRY BRUSHING

Dry brushing is the practice of brushing dry skin with light, rhythmic strokes to encourage lymph fluid movement, support natural detoxification, and promote circulation. Dry brushing can be a complement to lymphatic drainage because it stimulates and drains the lymphatic system.

The website below has additional information on dry brushing, including:

- » Benefits of dry brushing
- » Choosing the right brush
- » Guidelines for safe dry brushing
- » Dry brushing the body
- » Dry brushing the face

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ADDITIONAL LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE RESOURCES

Watch videos from a certified lymphedema therapist with experience supporting individuals with FOP, hear from a caregiver of a person with FOP who has benefited from lymphatic drainage, and explore additional resources on how to implement lymphatic drainage at home using dry brushing techniques at ifopa.org/lymphatic-drainage-resources.