
CONFESSIONS OF A LYMPHOMANAIC

Men's Health Magazine 2001



rhythm
massage
development

Prepared by:
RHYTHM MASSAGE DEVELOPMENT AND
EDUCATION



THE MOST IMPORTANT WAY TO COMBAT CANCER AND HEART DISEASE MIGHT BE TO LOOK AFTER YOUR LYMPHATIC SYSTEM.

Here's what you need to know about your "other bloodstream"

WE'RE COCKY ABOUT our cardiac regimen. Low-Fat diet? Check. Aerobic exercise? Running fools. Supplements? Daily Asprin? Wine with dinner Yes, yes and make our Merlot. Stress reduction? Us worry? We even do weight training and have regular check-ups. We're poster boys for heart health getting every conceivable edge, right?

Wrong! Or so says Dr. Gerald Lemole, one of the most distinguished heart surgeons in the US. A lot of men are overlooking an additional line of defense against heart disease. "There would be far less heart disease and far fewer heart attacks if people took care of their lymphatic systems" says Lemole, a professor of surgery at Thomas Jefferson University Medical School.

And he ought to know -he's done thousands of heart operations, over the course of a 35 year career that stemmed from working with cardiac-surgery pioneer Michael DeBakey.

If you have no idea what the lymphatic system is, join the crowd. The only time most people hear the word "lymph" is in bad cancer news, as in "It's spread to the lymph nodes" And there's been little research on the link between the lymphatic system and a healthy heart.

However, Lemole believes, that by not optimising lymphatic function, we're missing out on a great way to take care of our tickers. "The lymph system is the river of life," he reveals, "a river nobody knows."

YOUR OTHER CIRCULATORY SYSTEM

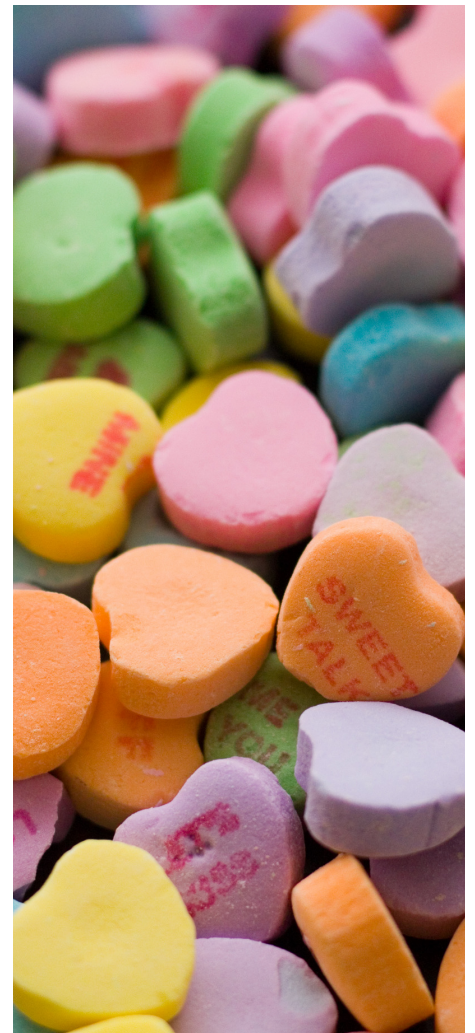
You have two circulatory systems. The famous one - starring your heart, lungs and blood vessels - and your lymphatic system, which desperately needs a publicist. Your body has more lymphatic fluid than blood and more lymph ducts than blood vessels. The lymphatic system - sometimes described as the circulatory system of our immune function - is a network of fluid, vessels and nodes that sweeps toxins from around our cells, filters out infectious organisms and ensures that harmful substances get to the liver for extraction and the kidneys for excretion.

The elaborate system of lymph vessels snakes through our bodies, intertwined with our blood vessels. It's punctuated by a series of lymph nodes - mesh-like tissues loaded with killer cells that catch and destroy invading germs. The most famous ones are the two you can feel at the base of your jaw bone (called cervical nodes) that swell with you have an infection. But there are hundreds of such defenders, concentrated in the armpits, groin, and neck.

At the countless points in our bodies where blood flows from bigger arteries into smaller capillaries, hydrostatic pressure forces fluid, containing oxygen and glucose, through the blood vessel walls and into the lymph. The oxygen and glucose float across a sea of lymph to nourish our cells.

Cell waste (lactic acid and metabolites) make the return trip across the lymph fluid and back into the bloodstream. But the exchange isn't perfectly efficient and harmful substances are left behind in the lymph.

If your lymphatic flow is strong, this isn't a problem because the toxins get swept away in the lymph, carried via ever bigger channels to the thoracic duct in the chest. From there, they re-enter the bloodstream and are just a blood-vessel ride away from the purifying liver and eliminating kidneys. But if your lymphatic flow is weak, the toxins hang around and get mischievous.



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"The longer toxins and metabolites linger in the lymph fluid, the more potential there is for inflammation," cautions Lemole, "and the greater your risk of atherosclerosis [hardening of the arteries]."

Lemole believes that strong lymphatic flow also plays a pivotal role in cholesterol clearance. You know the good HDL cholesterol that sweeps the bad LDL out of your blood vessels? Well, unless the lymph that surrounds and infuses the outer layer of the blood vessels flows freely, there can be a cholesterol-disposal back-up.

Cholesterol that stays inside the vessel walls contributes to plaque formation, which is often a prelude to a heart attack or stroke.

AN IMPORTANT DUCT, A HEARTLESS SYSTEM

The thoracic duct, which traverses your entire chest, is the lymphatic Mighty Murray, the largest duct in the system (between a pencil and a pinky finger in diameter) All the other lymph vessels drain into the thoracic duct. Good thoracic flow is vital both because the duct is big and because it's near the heart. To get good flow, it's important to keep in mind the key distinction between the circulatory and lymphatic systems.

The lymphatic system has no heart, so it has no pump to force the fluid along. And even though the minor muscle activity that comes with merely moving around and breathing moves lymph fluid, the secret to really great lymphatic health is finding ways to urge the fluid onward and keep the ducts especially the important thoracic ducts, wide open. "It's primarily a drainage system," reveals Lemole. "Keep it flowing fast and clear and you'll maximize your cardiovascular health."

The study of optimal lymphatic function, is a work in progress. But Lemole's new book, *The Healing Diet*, is a state-of-the-art handbook for supercharging your body's environmental protection agency. These high flow strategies will help your river of life to flow freely.

Warning: some of the suggestions that follow have a hint of the East about them Deep breathing, Yoga, Massage. And know some men hate to, you know, do calming stuff. We can only give you the facts. If you're so trapped by a sweaty, male notion, of fitness that you ignore advice from a top cardiac surgeon, well, your brother will probably watch out for your wife and kids.

Here's a thought we found motivation these principles of lymphatic health offer male-friendly, mechanical explanation the benefits of moves that have, until now been shrouded in a quasi-mystical, touchy-feely, feminine aura. You no longer have to assume the lotus position in search of serenity. Now, you can do it to move the damn fluid through the damn pipe!

ASSUME THE POSITION

Yoga is an ideal tool for lymphatic health, according to Lemole. “The powerful feeling of peace produced by yoga and meditation releases hormones that dilate the vessels and increase toxic clearance.” the the phrase “feeling of peace” irritates you, keep this in mind - yoga breathing and many yoga positions open up the chest cavity.

Lemole believes that a shoulder stand every now and then enlists gravity to help the lymphatic fluid get where it's going.

Can't quite bring yourself to sign up for a yoga class? Here are two moves you can do on the sly in your garage. Go ahead, we won't tell anybody.

COBRA

Keep your hips on the floor, stretch your upper back as far as possible, look up a ceiling mounted TV.



SHOULDER STAND

Support your lower back with your hands, straighten your spine and legs, contemplate your navel.

