Self Manual Lymphatic Drainage

The following are basic techniques for self-MLD but before starting any self-treatment, check with your doctor or therapist for any possible contraindications.

Ideally, the self-MLD protocol should be performed at least once a day and be accompanied by full body sessions performed by a therapist.

It is important to understand the correct pressure to apply with the strokes, as well as the direction of movements.

*Stationary circles* are one of the basic manual techniques used in Manual Lymph Drainage. This stroke involves a working phase and a resting phase. They should be executed using light pressure in the working phase, and during the resting phase of the circle, the hand should relax completely. The light directional pressure in the working phase also serves to move lymph fluid in the appropriate direction. It is not necessary to apply high pressures to achieve this goal. In fact, too much pressure could damage lymphatic structures. The amount of pressure is sometimes described as the pressure applied while stroking a newborn’s head. The circles should be large enough to stretch the skin, but the hand should not slide over the skin. As mentioned above, the pressure is released during the resting phase, in which the elasticity of the skin moves the hand passively back to the starting position. In this pressure-free phase, small lymph vessels absorb tissue fluid from the tissues.

Each stroke should be repeated 5-7 times on the same placement.

*Pretreatment*

Circles with the fingers lying flat above the collarbone on both sides.
The pressure is directed towards the neck.

It would be easiest for the right hand to manipulate the skin above the left collarbone and vice versa.

*Neck* (no photo)
Circles with the fingers lying flat on the side of neck (one hand on each side) towards the collar bone.
Arms

Circles in the center of the opposite armpit. Pressure is given with the flat hand and is directed downward into the armpit.

Circles covering the deltoid and shoulder area. The pressure is directed towards the neck in several placements.

Rework the outside portion of the upper arm from the elbow to the shoulder with circles. The pressure is directed towards the shoulder.

Circles with flat fingers from the inside portion of the upper arm. Work the entire upper arm from the top down to the elbow with this technique.

Circles in the front of the elbow, the forearm and the hand. Turn your forearm, so you can reach all aspects of it.

The pressure is always directed to the upper arm.

Rework your upper arm, then the forearm. You may repeat as many of the hand placements as you wish.
Abdominal breathing

Discuss possible contraindications with your therapist.

Place both hands flat on your belly and inhale against your hands. The hands follow the belly while you exhale; at the end of the exhalation, both hands press downward and upward (into the thorax). Repeat 5 times.

Legs

You can choose to work either seating or lying down.

Circles with the flat hand in the area of the inguinal lymph nodes on the same side. The hand lies just below the inguinal ligament (which runs approximately parallel to the lower line of your panties or briefs) and the pressure is directed towards the belly.

Circles covering the outside of the thigh and the hip in several placements. The pressure is directed towards the body.

Circles with the flat fingers of both hands behind the knee. The pressure is directed towards the thigh.

Circles with one or both hands in several placements on the inside of lower leg, between the knee and the ankle. The pressure is directed towards the thigh.

Circles with the fingers of one hand lying flat on the back of the foot (no photo). The pressure is directed towards the ankles.
Rework your leg. (You may repeat as many of the hand placements as you wish.)

(Adapted from the Academy of Lymphatic Studies Patient Education for Lymphedema Management)