

Improve Your Physical and Psychological Health With This Simple Lymphatic Drainage Routine

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Your lymphatic system, integral to immune function and waste removal, significantly influences overall health, including physical, mental and emotional aspects
- › The "Big 6" routine developed by chiropractor Perry Nickelston involves stimulating six key lymphatic points to enhance blood flow, nerve response and the clearance of toxins. The "Big 6" lymphatic drainage points are: above and below the collarbone, jawline, chest, abdomen, hip area and back of the knees
- › A lymphatic drainage routine helps reduce swelling, facilitates detoxification, helps prevent disease by boosting immune function, and improves digestion and nutrient absorption
- › Understanding the lymphatic system's unique pressure system is essential; drainage should start at low-pressure areas (above and below the collarbone) and move towards higher-pressure areas to prevent swelling, especially in extremities
- › Enhanced proprioception, resulting from a well-functioning lymphatic system, translates into a feeling of safety by allowing the brain to accurately sense joint positions and movements, thus reducing injury risk and boosting confidence and psychological well-being

The lymphatic system is a crucial part of your body's immune and waste removal systems, and as such play a significant role in your overall health and well-being. Its proper functioning affects physical, mental, and emotional health through its network of

vessels and nodes that transport lymph, a fluid containing white blood cells and waste products.

As explained by Perry Nickelston, a practicing chiropractor, in the video above, maintaining a healthy lymphatic system is important for preventing health issues like infections, joint pain, fatigue, and more serious conditions such as lymphedema and cancer.

Your lymphatic system helps remove toxins and waste, supports the immune system, and aids in the absorption and transport of fats and vitamins. The lymphatic system of your brain is called the glymphatic system, and it's essential for removing waste products from your brain.

When either of these systems gets congested, sluggish or blocked, it can have severe effects on your physical and mental/neurological health.

Regular exercise, a healthy diet, adequate hydration and stress management are essential for supporting lymphatic function. Eastern practices such as Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) have long recognized the lymphatic system's importance, using methods like lymphatic massage, yoga and herbal remedies to support the free flow of lymph.

To support the health of your lymphatic system, Nickelston has developed a six-step routine called the Big 6, which he describes in the featured video. The routine involves stimulating key lymphatic points in your body by rubbing, tapping and massaging them.

Common Detox Symptoms That May Arise

While the routine may appear deceptively simple, it can have a profound effect, as stimulating these lymphatic spots will boost blood flow to and from various tissues, change how your nerves respond to tightness in the tissues, and encourage the clearance of toxins from your body through your sweat, urine and feces.

As a result of this detoxifying process, you may experience a period of increased fatigue, lethargy, pain, headache, general malaise or illness-like symptoms. This is a sign that toxins are being expelled. As noted by Nickelston, “that is normal.” To aid the detox process, make sure you drink some water before and/or after doing the routine.

Understanding the Lymphatic Pressure System

The lymphatic system operates on a unique pressure system that is pivotal for its efficient functioning. This system's design ensures the effective drainage of lymph back into the bloodstream.

Understanding the pressure gradients within the lymphatic system is crucial for promoting optimal lymph flow and preventing the accumulation of fluids, which can lead to swelling, especially in the extremities like the hands and feet.

The areas around and above the collarbone represent the points of lowest lymphatic pressure. It is here that the lymphatic fluid drains back into the venous blood system, completing its circuit around the body. Because these points are the final destination for lymph being cleared from the body, they are crucial in the lymphatic drainage process.

Conversely, your hands and feet are the farthest from these low-pressure points, making them more prone to swelling due to the accumulation of lymph fluid, as gravity and distance impede the fluid's return flow.

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To effectively encourage the movement of lymph through its vessels and nodes, it is essential to clear the lymphatic system from areas of low pressure toward those of high pressure.

This means that any lymphatic drainage technique or routine should never start with the extremities, where pressure is higher and fluid accumulation is more common. Instead, starting at the collarbone – where the pressure is lowest – and working outward and upward, ensures that these low-pressure pathways remain open and able to receive lymph from other parts of the body.

Nickelston's Big 6 Routine

The six key points for effective lymphatic drainage are as follows. In the video above, Tim Boettner of Think Flow Grow does a full demonstration of Nickelston's routine so you can follow along. Again, make sure to do them in the correct order, as listed. Use whatever pressure and speed that feels good. You're not seeking to cause pain.

The whole routine can be completed in just a few minutes and can be done any time of the day. Getting into the habit of doing it once a day, perhaps during your morning shower, is the best way to reap maximum benefits.

- 1. Above and below your collarbone** – Initiating drainage here facilitates the clearance of lymph back into the circulatory system. Begin by lightly rubbing above, over and below your collarbone on one side for several seconds. Next, lightly tap the area with open hand, and then rub the area in a circular motion clockwise and counterclockwise. Repeat on the other side.
- 2. Jawline** – Rubbing and massaging your jawline helps drain lymph from your head and neck. The spot you're working is located at the top of your neck, directly behind the angle of your jawbone just below your earlobe. Using two or three fingers, rub that area in an up and down motion on one side. Then, lightly tap and do some circular rubbing. Repeat on the other side.
- 3. Chest** – Clearing the chest area supports the drainage of lymph from the upper torso and arms. The spot you're looking for is where your shoulder attaches to your pectoral muscle. Perform the same rubbing, tapping massaging motions as before on each side.

- 4. Abdomen** – The abdomen is a central hub for lymphatic activity, influencing digestion and lower body lymph flow. To locate the correct spot, place one hand over your belly button and the other hand directly above that. Using both hands, rub your belly up and down. Then, tap your belly with both hands, then stack your hands one atop the other, press your hands into your abdomen and rub in circles.
- 5. Front of the hip** – Stimulating this area encourages the movement of lymph from the lower extremities toward your core. Place your hands over the crease of your groin and rub up and down, then tap and rub in circles.
- 6. Back of the knees** – Finally, the area behind the knees is critical for draining lymph from the lower legs, reducing the risk of swelling in the feet and ankles. Simply place your hands behind your knees and rub above and below the crease of your knees in an up and down motion. Then tap the crease and rub in a circular motion.

When done with all six areas, stand up, lift your heels off the floor and lightly bounce up and down on the balls of your feet for 20 to 30 seconds and shake out your hands and arms.

Adhering to this order is paramount for maintaining an efficient lymphatic system. By starting at the points of lowest pressure and methodically working toward areas of higher pressure, it's possible to enhance lymph flow throughout the body, bolstering immune function, reducing swelling and promoting overall health.

The Psychological Benefits of Lymphatic Drainage

As explained by Nickelston, this lymphatic drainage routine can also have significant benefits for your emotional and mental health. The reason for this is because when your brain can accurately sense where your body's joints are in space – a faculty known as proprioception – it significantly contributes to a feeling of safety and security.

Proprioception is part of your body's sensory system, providing continuous feedback about the position of limbs, the tension in muscles, and the state of joint movement.

This sensory information is crucial for maintaining balance, coordinating movements, and performing daily activities confidently and efficiently.

The link between proprioception and feelings of safety lies in your brain's ability to predict and control bodily movements. When proprioceptive feedback is clear and accurate, your brain can effectively anticipate the outcome of movements, reducing the risk of injury and enhancing physical autonomy. This predictability and control are foundational to a sense of safety, as they enable you to navigate your environment with assurance.

Additionally, clearing the lymphatic system reduces swelling and inflammation around joints, which can otherwise impede the flow of sensory information. Swelling can distort the signals sent by proprioceptors (sensory receptors that detect motion and position) located in muscles, tendons, and joint capsules, leading to decreased proprioceptive accuracy.

As the lymphatic system is optimized and fluid balance is restored, proprioceptors can function more effectively, sending clearer, more precise signals to your brain. As you become more attuned to your body's positions and movements, you develop a heightened sense of spatial awareness and body control.

This improvement not only aids in physical performance but also reinforces the neural pathways responsible for proprioceptive processing, making your brain more adept at interpreting and utilizing this information.

The culmination of these effects – a well-functioning lymphatic system and enhanced proprioception – contributes to a greater sense of bodily integrity and safety.

When your brain can reliably know where your body is in space, it reduces the perceived risk of falling or suffering an injury, which in turn diminishes anxiety and enhances confidence in your physical capabilities. This assurance extends beyond mere physical safety, influencing psychological well-being by fostering a sense of control and competence in interacting with the world.