

# Lymph

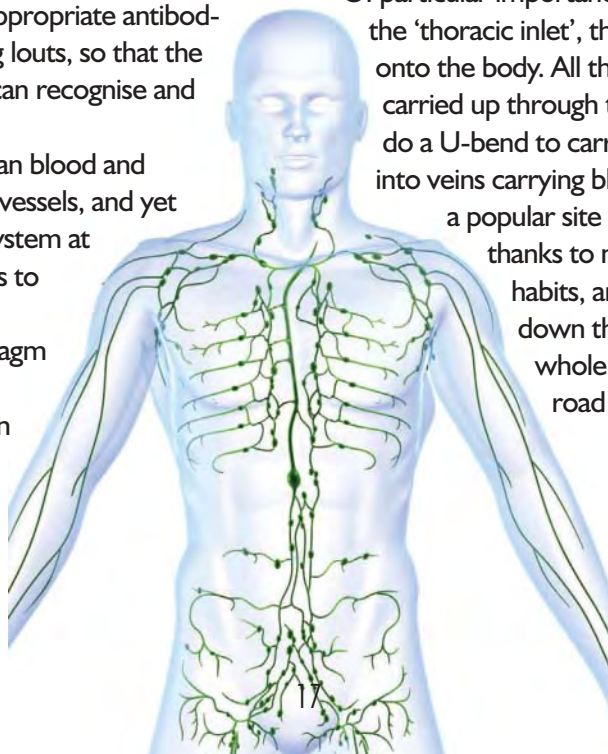
**L**YMPH is a hard working, vital to life fluid, but it gets almost no credit at all. If lymphatic flow stopped, it has been estimated that we would have no more than 24 hours to live. But does lymph get even a fraction of the media attention of that limelight hogging blood? Oh No.

Throughout our bodies fluid leaks out of tiny arteries to carry nutrients and chemical messengers to our cells. Some of this fluid rejoins the blood circulation by finding its way back into veins, the rest is gathered up by lymphatic vessels, becoming the clear, straw coloured fluid we call lymph. At various points around the body, most notably around large joints, lymphatic vessels pass through 'lymph nodes'. These structures, often referred to as 'glands', swell due to increased activity when they are involved in fighting an infection, leading to the oft heard comment that, 'my glands are up'.

In addition to collecting up all the fluid that was skulking around the stationary cupboard, hoping to avoid being given any work, the lymphatic vessels present this fluid, complete with any contaminating infectious organisms, to the lymphatic nodes for inspection. It is in the nodes where infections are recognised and the appropriate antibodies are ordered to 'tag' the infecting louts, so that the police cells of the immune system can recognise and apprehend the troublemakers.

Our bodies contain more lymph than blood and more lymphatic vessels than blood vessels, and yet there is no heart in the lymphatic system at all, so we rely on other mechanisms to move the lymph around.

The piston-like action of the diaphragm as it powers our breathing, creates alternating pressure waves between our chest and abdominal cavity. These waves suck lymph from our legs and abdomen up into our chests. Add to this the rhythmic contractions of skeletal muscles,



causing pressure on lymphatic vessels that are fitted with non-return valves, and you have a fully functioning fluid circulation system. These are exactly the same mechanisms that aid blood on its return journey to the heart (but don't expect star struck blood to mention this during chat show interviews!)

This is another example of the need for adequate movement and another mechanism by which mechanical restric-

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tions in the body have an adverse effect on our health. It is also another mechanism by which osteopaths work to improve overall health by optimising mechanical function, and restoring normal movement.

Of particular importance is the area osteopaths refer to as the 'thoracic inlet', this is the area where the neck joins onto the body. All the lymph collected in the body is carried up through this area in two ducts, which then do a U-bend to carry the lymph back down to empty into veins carrying blood back to the heart. This area is a popular site for concentrating stress and strain, thanks to modern lifestyles and postural habits, and the resulting stiffness can slow down the flow of lymph throughout the whole body. The effect is a bit like a single road being closed in Argyll!

Andrew Pallas ND DO MRN  
Osteopath & Naturopath  
Oban Complementary Health  
Centre  
Tel: 01631 567054



Andrew Pallas -  
Osteopath & Naturopath  
at Oban Complementary  
Health Centre