

Post-Operative Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD)

What to Expect & Self-Care Guidelines

First and foremost, always follow your surgeon's post-operative instructions above all else.

These guidelines are meant to complement—not replace—your surgeon's specific recommendations.

What to Expect During Your Session

Post-Operative Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD) is a **gentle, non-painful technique** designed to support your body's natural healing process after surgery.

In the **early stages of recovery**, sessions focus exclusively on **reducing swelling, improving circulation, and supporting lymph flow**. The pressure used is light—often compared to gentle skin stretching or rhythmic brushing—and should never be painful.

The protocol itself is **methodical, rhythmic, and systematic by design**, following the natural pathways of your lymphatic system. Though the technique is subtle, it is highly effective—and most clients find it to be **deeply relaxing**, often drifting into a meditative or restful state during treatment.

As your healing progresses and your **surgeon clears you for more focused work**, your therapist may gradually incorporate techniques to address **fibrosis, scar tissue, and residual adhesions**. Even then, the work remains comfortable and appropriate for your body's current stage of recovery.

It's important to understand that **MLD is not a one-time treatment**. Consistent follow-up sessions are essential for optimal results. It is generally recommended to receive **three 90-minute treatments per week for the first two weeks**. Sessions will be **tapered off gradually** as your swelling subsides and your healing stabilizes.

Regular MLD helps to:

- Prevent fluid from reaccumulating
- Encourage balanced tissue healing
- Reduce long-term swelling and hardness
- Support the body's overall detoxification and recovery

You may notice:

- A sense of lightness or relief as fluid begins to move
- Gurgling or increased swallowing, which are signs your lymphatic system is responding
- No deep pressure or pain—proper MLD should never hurt

If anything feels uncomfortable, communicate that right away. MLD should always feel safe, soothing, and supportive to your healing body.

What to Expect After Your Session

- **Increased urination:** It's normal to notice more frequent trips to the restroom. This is your lymphatic system flushing out excess fluid and waste.
- **Feeling lighter or less pressure:** As swelling decreases, many clients notice relief from that "tight" or heavy sensation in the treated areas.
- **Softer tissue texture:** The skin and underlying tissue may feel smoother and more mobile as fluid shifts and congestion decreases.
- **Improved comfort and mobility:** You may notice an easier range of motion and a more relaxed feeling in the treated areas.

Self-Care Between Sessions

Stay Hydrated

Drink plenty of water throughout the day to support lymphatic drainage and tissue healing. Aim for at least **half your body weight in ounces of water daily**, unless your physician advises otherwise.

Gentle Movement

Light walking (as cleared by your surgeon) helps stimulate lymph flow. Avoid strenuous activity or heavy lifting until you've been cleared for it.

Breathe Deeply

Deep, slow breathing activates the diaphragm, which naturally boosts lymphatic circulation. Try taking several intentional deep breaths every hour.

Wear Your Compression Garment

If prescribed, wear your **compression garment exactly as directed by your surgeon**. This is essential for minimizing swelling and supporting optimal contouring. It is best to not alter the compression garment unless directed by your surgeon.

Positioning Matters

Elevate swollen areas above heart level when possible. Avoid lying flat for long periods if your surgeon advises against it.

Gentle Hygiene

When cleared to shower, use mild soap and pat (don't rub) your skin dry. Avoid heat, hot tubs, or saunas until your incisions are fully healed.

Avoid These Until Cleared:

- Vigorous massage or self-manipulation of surgical areas
- Excessive salt intake (can increase swelling)
- Over-the-counter creams or oils not approved by your surgeon

Supporting Your Healing at Home

- Support your body's healing by choosing nutrient-rich foods like fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins. The brighter the colors of your fruits and veggies, the better—those vibrant hues are full of nutrients that promote repair, reduce inflammation, and help your body maintain the beautiful results your surgeon has achieved.
- Rest when your body asks for it—healing takes energy.
- Keep follow-up appointments with both your surgeon and your MLD therapist for optimal results.

When to Contact Your Surgeon

If you notice any of the following:

- Sharp or increasing pain
- Unusual redness, warmth, or discharge near incision sites
- Fever or chills
- Sudden swelling in one area
- Difficulty breathing or dizziness
- Any additional circumstances listed on your surgical discharge paperwork

These are **medical concerns** that require immediate attention from your surgical team.

In Summary

Your body is doing incredible work healing from surgery. Manual Lymphatic Drainage supports that process by gently encouraging proper fluid flow and recovery—but **your surgeon's instructions are always your top priority.**

Continue to follow your surgeon's recommendations closely, and communicate any changes or concerns promptly.



Stay Connected

For scheduling, aftercare questions, or follow-up guidance, call or text us at 919-374-8013.

The Haven at Cary

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"Your healing journey deserves gentle, expert care."