



Lymphatic Stagnation

Swollen Lymph Nodes, Sore Throats, Tonsillitis, and Related Ailments

Until the latter part of the 20th century, the role of the lymphatic system was not clearly understood. The lymphatic system is a complementary system to the circulatory system. The circulatory system delivers oxygen and nutrients to the cells, while the lymphatic system is responsible for cleaning up cellular waste and debris.

The lymphatic system permeates every part of the body. It draws fluid from the tissue spaces and carries it through a series of lymphatic ducts and nodes back to the circulatory system. The lymph nodes are primary sites of immune activity, where lymphatic fluid is purified before being returned to the circulatory system.

When the lymphatic system is overloaded with debris, the lymph nodes will become swollen and inflamed, and the lymphatic system will become congested. Most people have felt swollen lymph nodes (also called lymph glands) in their neck when they've had a sore throat, as sore throats always involve some degree of lymphatic congestion and stagnation.

Lymphatic congestion is at the base of many common health problems besides, not only sore throats, but tonsillitis, earaches and ear infections, breast swelling and tenderness, some cases of prostate swelling, and chronic sinus problems. Some clues that indicate lymphatic congestion may be present include a heavy coating on the tongue and a rolling or slippery pulse. Another way to determine if lymphatic circulation is sluggish is to depress the skin on the back of the hand with the thumb. If the skin takes three or more seconds to return to normal color after being depressed, the lymphatics are probably sluggish.

The first key to reducing lymphatic sluggishness is to make certain you are drinking an adequate amount of water. Moderate dehydration will contribute to poor lymphatic drainage. A second key to improving lymphatic drainage is activity. Because the lymphatic system has no pump (unlike the circulatory system which is actively powered by the heart), it depends on physical movement to create flow. Lymphatic flow greatly increases with even moderate exercise.

One of the best forms of lymphatic exercise is gentle bouncing on a minitrampoline. If a person is unable to stand on the minitrampoline, he or she can still obtain benefit by sitting in a chair next to the minitrampoline with his or her feet on the trampoline. Another person stands on the minitrampoline and gently bounces up and down. This passively moves the lymphatics as the seated person's legs move up and down. If you don't own a minitrampoline, don't worry. Just walking and breathing deeply will greatly enhance lymphatic circulation, as will any other form of moderate exercise.

Many herbs that can help enhance lymphatic drainage. These include mullein, lobelia, echinacea, red root, red clover, yarrow, calendula, plantain, ocotillo, stillingia, and cleavers. Although these herbs can be used separately, they are usually more effective as part of a formula.

Four capsules of mullein taken with one capsule of lobelia is a powerful combination for reducing swollen lymph nodes, even in extreme situations such as the mumps. Red root and echinacea are also a powerful team for shrinking swollen lymph nodes, especially when there is a low grade infection in the body. Two commercial formulas that can help with lymphatic swelling and low grade infections are Lymph Gland Cleanse and Lymph Gland Cleanse-HY. These formulas both contain yarrow and echinacea as lymphatic cleansers and infection fighters. The regular version of this formula contains goldenseal, while the HY version of the formula exchanges myrrh gum for goldenseal. It was designed for hypoglycemics who do not tolerate the blood sugar lowering effect of goldenseal very well.

For chronic lymphatic congestion and swelling, the newly improved Lymphomax formula is very helpful. This is an excellent formula which contains seven of the lymph moving herbs previously mentioned—mullein, plantain, cleavers, echinacea, yarrow, lobelia and red root. This is a very effective blend for swollen lymph nodes, chronic sore throats, breast swelling and tenderness, and chronic respiratory congestion due to lymphatic congestion.

A gentler, but equally effective, lymphatic remedy is the Lymphatic Drainage Formula. It contains three lymphatic herbs—cleavers, red clover, and stillingia—along with the circulatory enhancing herb, prickly ash. This herbal extract can be added to water and sipped frequently throughout the day to improve drainage in the lymphatic system. Being in a liquid form, it is an excellent lymphatic remedy for young children and the elderly.

Keeping the lymphatic system flowing freely is one of the fundamental principles of maintaining good health. Using the two keys to increasing lymphatic movement (water and physical activity), along with some of the lymph-moving herbs we've discussed, can keep this vital branch of the circulatory system working properly.

Selected References

The Book of Herbal Wisdom by Matthew Wood

The Golden Seven Plus One by C. Samuel West

Herbal Therapy and Supplements by Merrily A. Kuhn and David Winston

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