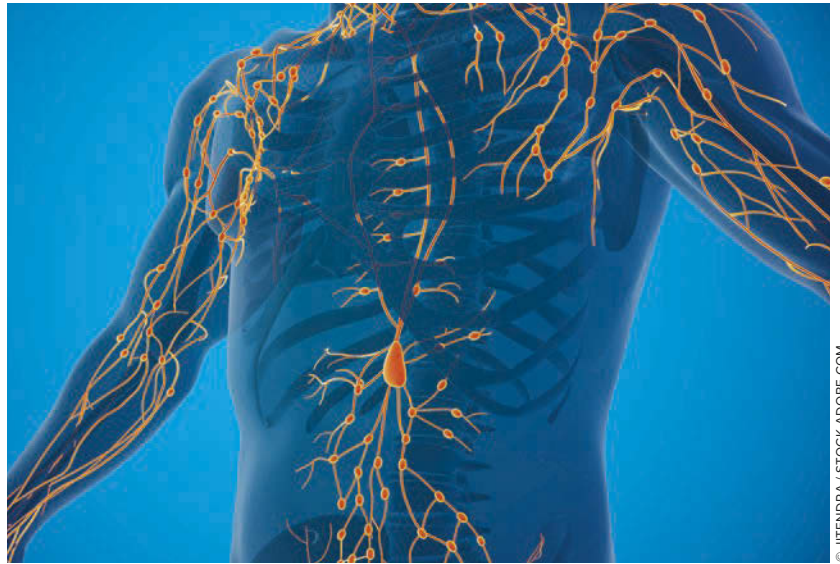




A good defense

Get to know this immune system hero

by DEBORAH HERLAX ENOS



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The lymphatic system (LS) is often called the body's unsung hero because it works hard to keep us healthy, but most of us don't know much about it.

It wasn't until my oncologist stressed the need to take care of my LS to avoid lymphedema that I began researching its importance. If someone has lymphedema, their LS cannot sufficiently drain the lymph fluid and swelling occurs, most often in the arms and legs.

According to Dr. Gerald M. Lemole, author of the book *Lymph & Longevity* (Scribner, 2021; not available at Costco), the better your LS runs, the better your body runs. The LS is the second line of defense—after skin—against foreign invaders, such as viruses and bacteria.

Josh Axe, a chiropractor and nutritionist, explains that “the LS—which consists of nodes and lymph vessels—is a significant part of your immune system. Its main jobs include defending against illnesses and infections and helping the body eliminate waste and abnormal cells.”

He adds that “the spleen and thymus are a part of the LS,” as well as the tonsils and adenoids, which “help trap pathogens before they can cause infections.”

According to Axe, the LS:

- Removes harmful bacteria and pathogens from the body
- Produces immune cells
- Removes excess fluids from body tissues and reduces swelling/inflammation.

According to Lemole, the lymphatic system doesn't have a central engine or pump like the heart, which pumps blood throughout the circulatory system. Instead, the LS works through pressure, meaning your lymph fluid primarily moves when you do. When you don't move, it doesn't move much, either.

Increased circulation, including increased blood flow and the flow of lymph fluid, is critical for removing waste from the body. So, get up and move every hour. Take a short walk around your house or add some stretches while sitting at your desk.

Another tip: Stay hydrated, but avoid sugary drinks and excess alcohol. The body needs plenty of water for blood flow and lymphatic drainage.

These simple changes can make a significant difference in your lymphatic system and your overall health. ■

Go with the flow

Dr. Gerald M. Lemole, a board-certified cardiothoracic surgeon, offers the following suggestions

to help increase lymph flow:

- Practice deep diaphragmatic breathing to help move lymphatic fluid.
- Various yoga pose movements help to move

lymphatic fluid through the lymphatic system.

- A NASA study found that jumping on a mini-trampoline can move lymphatic fluid four times faster than walking.—*DHE*