

# Dry Brushing & Lymphatic Drainage

How the body's other circulatory system works — and what actually moves it

Blood has the heart to push it along. Lymph doesn't — it relies entirely on movement, which is exactly where dry brushing and lymphatic drainage come in. Here's what each one actually does, what the evidence supports, and when to bring in a professional.

01

## HOW LYMPH ACTUALLY MOVES

Unlike blood, lymph has no pump of its own — no heart pushing it along. It relies almost entirely on muscle movement, breathing, and external pressure to carry waste, excess fluid, and immune cells back toward the heart. Stay still too long and lymph pools, which is part of why swelling shows up after a long flight or a day spent sitting.

### GETTING STARTED

*Any movement helps: walking, stretching, or even flexing your calves works the lymphatic system the way a heartbeat works the circulatory one.*

02

## WHAT DRY BRUSHING ACTUALLY DOES

Dry brushing is a genuine, low-risk exfoliation technique: sweeping a stiff brush over dry skin removes dead skin cells and creates a temporary flush from increased surface circulation. What current research does not support is the claim that dry brushing measurably moves lymph or reduces cellulite — those effects remain unproven, even though the ritual itself is a reasonable, low-risk habit many people find genuinely relaxing.

### GETTING STARTED

*Brush in long strokes from hands and feet inward, toward the heart, using light pressure — skin should flush pink, never turn red or break.*

03

## MANUAL LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE: THE CLINICAL VERSION

Manual lymphatic drainage (MLD) is a distinct, trained technique — gentle, rhythmic pressure applied by a certified therapist in specific directions to stimulate lymph vessels directly. Unlike DIY dry brushing, MLD has real supporting evidence, particularly for lymphedema following breast cancer treatment, and is typically combined with compression and exercise as part of a broader therapy protocol rather than used alone.

### GETTING STARTED

*If you're managing diagnosed swelling or lymphedema, this is worth seeking from a certified MLD therapist rather than trying to fully replicate at home.*

## WHEN TO HOLD OFF

Both dry brushing and lymphatic drainage should be skipped over active infections, fevers, blood clots, or directly over any area of active cancer, and approached cautiously with a doctor's guidance during pregnancy or with heart or kidney conditions. None of this is a substitute for medical advice — think of it as a checklist for when to ask a professional first.

### SIGNS TO STOP AND CHECK IN WITH A DOCTOR

*Acute pain, fever, sudden or one-sided swelling, or shortness of breath.*

## Start with what's free

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[pistilapothecary.com](https://pistilapothecary.com)

*This is general educational information, not medical advice. If you have diagnosed lymphedema, a blood clotting disorder, active cancer, or a heart or kidney condition, talk with a doctor or certified lymphedema therapist before starting either practice.*