- Lymphatic system

No need for specific exercise for good lymphatic health

The Straits Times · 9 Sep 2026 · Danielle Friedman WHAT IS THE LYMPHATIC SYSTEM?

NEW YORK – For years, the wellness world has talked up the benefits of lymphatic drainage. Some influencers promote practices like self-massage and dry brushing, claiming those methods can detox and de-puff the body by improving the circulation of lymph fluid.



Now, some on social media are suggesting specific exercise routines they say can be especially helpful for draining the fluid and reducing swelling and bloating.

One trending workout, called “lymphatic walking”, involves simply taking a relaxed stroll while focusing on your posture and breathing, and letting your arms and hands swing free. Another is “rebounding”, or jumping either in place or on a trampoline. Some influencers also promote specific dynamic stretching routines for lymphatic drainage.

This social media hype may reflect a growing interest in the lymphatic system in medicine, said Marc Miller, a physical therapist who specialises in lymphatic health at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

“Lymphatics is a really hot topic right now” among researchers, he said, in part because of technological advances for mapping the lymphatic system. But some important nuances are often lost in the social media conversation, he added.

If your lymphatic system is healthy, no evidence suggests that specific workouts are more or less effective for maintaining it – although exercise does play a role.

Your lymphatic system is an intricate network of vessels and nodes that helps maintain fluid balance throughout your body and support your immune system. The vessels transport a fluid called lymph.

If your body is fighting an infection, the lymphatic system picks up pieces of bacteria or viruses and transports them to your lymph nodes, which act as filters and help your immune system combat them, said Tiana Woolridge, a sports medicine physician at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York.

Unlike your cardiovascular system, which relies on the heart to keep blood flowing, your lymphatic system lacks a central pump. Instead, it depends on muscle contractions – from movement, breathing and even digestion – to squeeze and move lymph around your body.

Most people's lymphatic systems hum along smoothly, said Jason Wheeler, a vascular medicine specialist at the Cleveland Clinic.

But some people will develop a disorder called lymphedema, in which lymph fluid pools in a part or parts of the body.

You are most likely to develop lymphedema after suffering some kind of damage to your lymphatic system because of injury, surgery or cancer treatment, but smoking, obesity and age can also predispose

you to the condition.

A much smaller percentage are born with a genetic condition that prevents their lymphatic system from draining properly.

Wheeler cautioned that just because you are puffy or bloated, this does not mean that you have lymphedema.

Many people experience these symptoms throughout the day in response to diet, poor sleep, the weather and other environmental factors.

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do for overall health: 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity and at least two sessions a week of strength training.

The stronger your muscles are, the better they are able to pump lymph fluid, Wheeler said. And in general, the more you contract your muscles through aerobic activities like walking, jogging or cycling, the more you are supporting your lymphatic system and keeping

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it circulating.

Beyond those basics, "it's really about just being consistent with movement throughout your day", said Kelly Sturm, a physical therapist in Minneapolis who focuses on lymphatic health.

That said, if someone with a healthy lymphatic system wants to try a walking or jumping workout billed as "lymphatic", there are few downsides, she said.

Deep, diaphragmatic breathing, which is incorporated into some of the so-called lymphatic workouts promoted online, can also help with lymphatic circulation.

Ultimately, "movement is medicine, no matter what kind of health we're talking about", Woolridge said.

If the goal of supporting your lymphatic health gets you moving, she added, your whole body will benefit.