

Lacteals and swollen abdomens

Discovery of Peyer`s Patches and Lacteals

The documented findings of 'milky veins' in a dog after digestion in 1622 was the first discovery of the lymphatic system by Italian physician Gaspard Asselli (1581 – 1626); he had found 'chlye'. Peyer's patches or aggregated lymphoid nodules, are named after Swiss anatomist Johann Conrad Peyer (1653 – 1712). Astonishingly some 396 years later, milky veins along with the Peyer`s Patches, Lacteals and the lymphatic system are all still trailing in the teachings of anatomy and physiology!

Peyer`s Patches

Found in the lowest portion of the small intestine large lymphoid aggregates, appearing as slightly elevated nodules than the surrounding tissue called Peyer`s Patches, are an important part of gut associated lymphoid tissue. They are mainly in the distal jejunum and the ileum but have also been detected in the duodenum; they occur in the submucosa throughout the intestines.

Lacteals

Lacteals hidden within the small intestine are a vital part of the lymphatic system and their influence on the body`s digestive function is immense. They absorb fats that are already emulsified by intestinal, pancreatic, and liver secretions. This emulsified fat combines with the lymph carried by the lacteals to form a `milky-white` liquid called 'chyle'. First, fat, in the form of chyle, is transported by a lacteal to larger lymphatic vessels in the mesentery (tissue that supports and nourishes the intestines); it then travels to the cisterna chyli, a large, sac-like structure behind the abdomen. Lymph and chyle from the cisterna chyli are transported up the thoracic duct passing through the diaphragm, to the left subclavian vein, back into blood circulation into the heart. This allows fat to be available throughout the bloodstream, so that it can be absorbed from anywhere in the body for instant energy. However, on its long journey back to the blood, fat and protein is regulated by the lymphatic system`s lymph nodes and waste must pass through hundreds of lymph nodes which rely on regular deep abdominal movement for correct filtration.

Lymphatic benefits of abdominal massage

How many of us enjoy doing abdominal massage? Think this is not necessarily an important part of a full body massage as the back, arms or legs? Or do we really have enough time? If we do abdominal massage at all, it is perhaps only as a brief gesture as we would rather spend time on other areas where we feel it is doing more good for muscles, blood flow or relaxation. Of course, on male clients abdomens, buttocks and inner thighs are best avoided, unless applying sports or remedial massage.

UK Lymphology Clinics - Study Room 5 - Massage World Magazine

Lacteals and swollen abdomens

In these times of increased obesity, we are seeing larger clients with swollen abdomens commonplace, and massaging them should really be high on your priority list, particularly if they remain large and dome shape when a client lays prone. Presented with a large abdomen is not every therapist's dream massage; you may also feel that you are being intrusive to this often-sensitive area. But by approaching abdominal massage from a new health benefit point of view, the application far outweighs hesitation. Apply knowledge and understanding about the underlying lymphatic system and its waste removal functions, Peyer's Patches and Lacteals. Its effect of reduced digestion and poor nutritional transportation is detrimental for long-term health and abdominal massage could be more beneficial to your client's health than they ever realized as swelling is an unnatural occurrence within body tissues. When presented with continuous swelling and/or a swollen abdomen, it should be noted on a record card.

Summary

With the surface area of a human small intestine equal to that of a tennis court, a swollen immobile abdomen needs all the help it can get. Intestinal transportation is assisted by the peristalsis action which also requires support from muscular strength to encourage natural lymphatic pressure changes, normally acquired from movement and exercise. Swollen abdomens have little of this movement or support and without them the lymphatic system struggles, visibly seen and felt as a swollen abdomen.

Do also note if the swollen abdomen is accompanied by swollen ankles as this indicates the lymphatic system is impaired when trying to drain up from the legs. A back flow is being caused by the swollen abdomen and therefore excessive fluid and waste removal, along with a reduced immune response, is causing the body distress and causing dysfunction which can lead to leg ulcers, lymphoedema and cellulitis.

Additionally, a new and more serious awareness of abdominal swelling has recently been launched by Ovarian Cancer charities. If unusual and swollen abdomens amongst women are observed, particularly if they have lost weight but the abdomen remains swollen, or the swelling increases and remains unusually bloated, they should be referred to their GP.

Lymphatic integrated massage includes education about the abdominal drainage process and will help to remove excess fluid and waste from within the abdomen.

Lacteals and swollen abdomens

