

**This issue includes:**

A recipe for
pavlova!



Q & A:
Lymphedema
Therapy



The purpose of
physical therapy
modalities

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Brostrom

Physical Therapy

Q & A: Lymphedema Therapy

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What is lymphedema?

Lymphedema is an abnormal accumulation of protein-rich fluid under the surface of the skin that causes chronic inflammation of the affected tissues. The onset can be gradual or can develop quickly following surgery or cancer treatments. Lymphedema can occur in almost any tissue of the body but is most common in the arms and legs.

What are the symptoms of lymphedema?

Generally, the swelling associated with lymphedema will start in the feet or hands and will reduce with elevation. As it progresses, the swelling is constant and the skin begins to harden and dry out. Discomfort in the affected extremity is common along with heaviness and achiness.

What causes lymphedema?

There are two forms of lymphedema, primary and secondary. Primary lymphedema, otherwise known as hereditary lymphedema, develops on its own. Secondary lymphedema results from damage to the lymphatic system caused by another condition or disease. Secondary lymphedema is the most common as it can be caused by cancer and its treatments.

What can PT do to help lymphedema?

Certified lymphedema therapists are trained in complete decongestive therapy. This includes skin and nail care, manual lymphatic drainage, compression bandages, exercise, and instruction in self-care. Skin and nail care is done to help reduce the risk of infection and keeps the skin soft and clean. Manual lymphatic drainage increases lymph-angio-activity to stimulate reabsorption of the protein-rich fluid, thus reducing the swelling in the affected area. Compression bandages help to prevent re-accumulation of the fluid back into the affected area. Exercise is used in conjunction with compression to increase muscle and joint pump as well as increase venous and lymphatic return.

Who can benefit from complete decongestive therapy or manual lymphatic drainage?

Those persons with lymphedema in any area of the body can be helped with complete decongestive therapy. Manual lymphatic drainage can help conditions such as localized edema associated with sprains and strains, post-surgical edema, autoimmune disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis and fibromyalgia, and migraine and sinus headache sufferers.

Quote of the Month:

“Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection
we can catch excellence.”
- Vince Lombardi



Physical Therapy Modalities & Their Purpose



Ultrasound

Ultrasound is effective in treating muscle tightness and spasms, as it warms the muscle and increases blood circulation.



Cold Pack

Cold packs decrease inflammation, which in turn decreases swelling and pain.



Electrical Stimulation

Electrical stimulation, often referred to as "E-stim," contracts the muscle, which makes them stronger. E-stim also promotes blood supply to the area being treated.



Hot pack

Hot packs relax tight muscles, decrease pain, and increase blood circulation to the area being treated.

When used in conjunction with manual therapy and therapeutic exercises, these modalities above can be very beneficial.

Recipe of the Month: *Pavlova with Lemon Curd and Berries*

INGREDIENTS:

For the Meringue

- 4 egg whites
- Pinch salt
- 8 oz caster sugar
- 1 tsp white vinegar
- 1/2 tsp vanilla
- 2 tsp corn flour

For the Lemon Curd

- 4 lemons, grated rind and juice
- 14 oz sugar
- 4 oz butter, diced
- 4 eggs, beaten

To Serve

- 8 fl oz double cream
- Mixed ripe berries, such as blueberries and blackberries



DIRECTIONS:

1. Heat the oven to 250 degrees F. Line a baking tray with baking paper, then draw a circle 20 cm in diameter in the middle of the paper.
2. Place the egg whites and pinch of salt in a clean, dry bowl. Beat with an electric whisk until soft peaks form. Gradually add caster sugar, beating well after each addition. Beat until the mixture is stiff and glossy. Fold in the vinegar, vanilla, and corn flour.
3. Pile the mixture onto the circle on the baking paper, shaping it with a spatula, and leaving the center slightly hollowed. Cook for 1 to 1 & 1/4 hours, or until crisp and dry on the outside. Turn off the oven and leave it to cool with the door ajar.
4. To make the curd, finely grate the rind of the lemons into a bowl and add the juice. Add the sugar, butter and beaten eggs to the bowl and sit it over a saucepan of simmering water - don't let the bowl touch the water, stir with a wooden spoon until thick and the curd coats the back of the spoon. Chill until needed.
5. To assemble the pavlova, whip the cream until it just holds stiff peaks, then fold about 3tbsp of the cream into the curd. Spoon the curd onto the meringue and heap the berries on top.
6. Serve with the remaining cream on the side.



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