

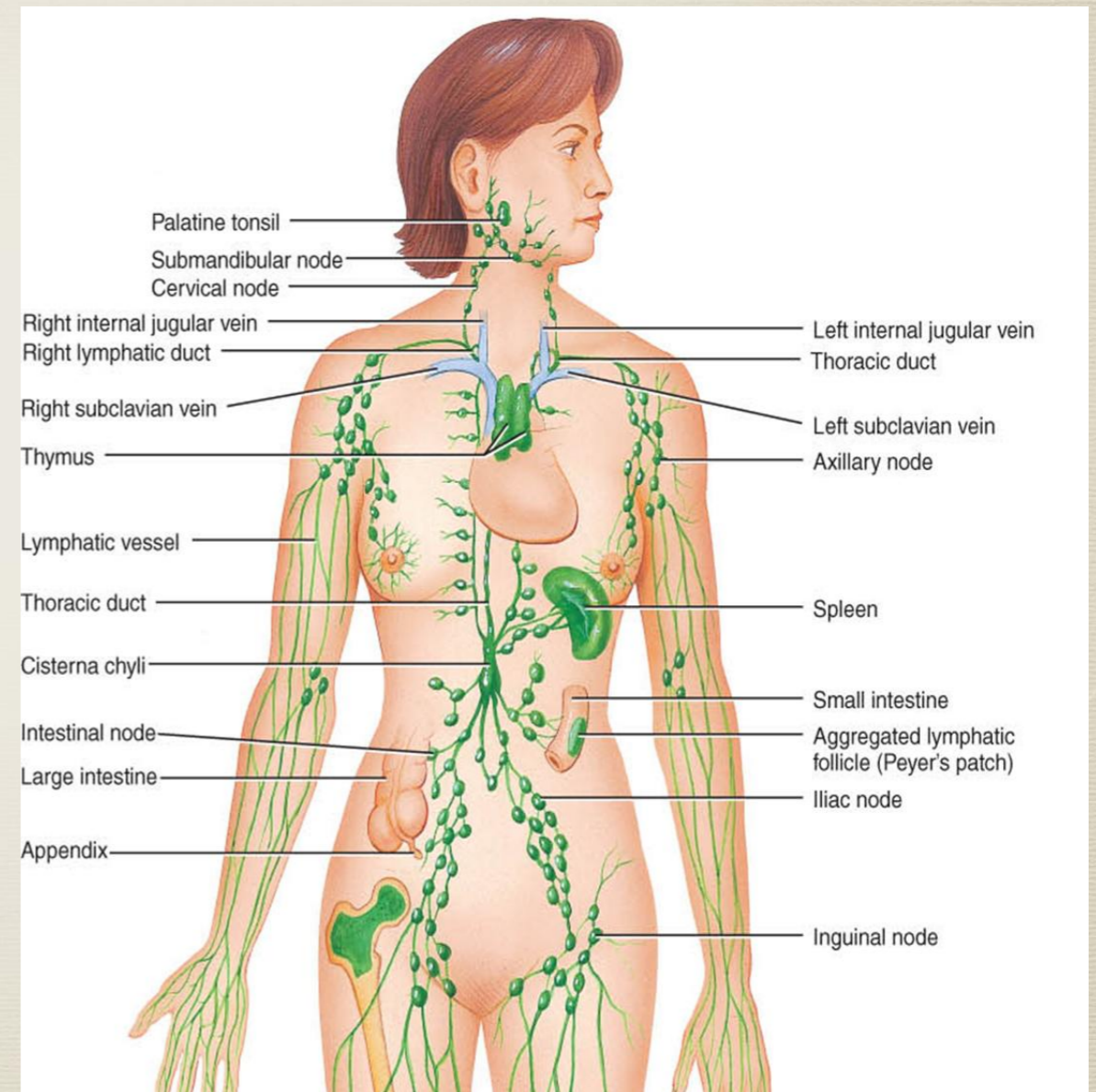
Lymphoedema

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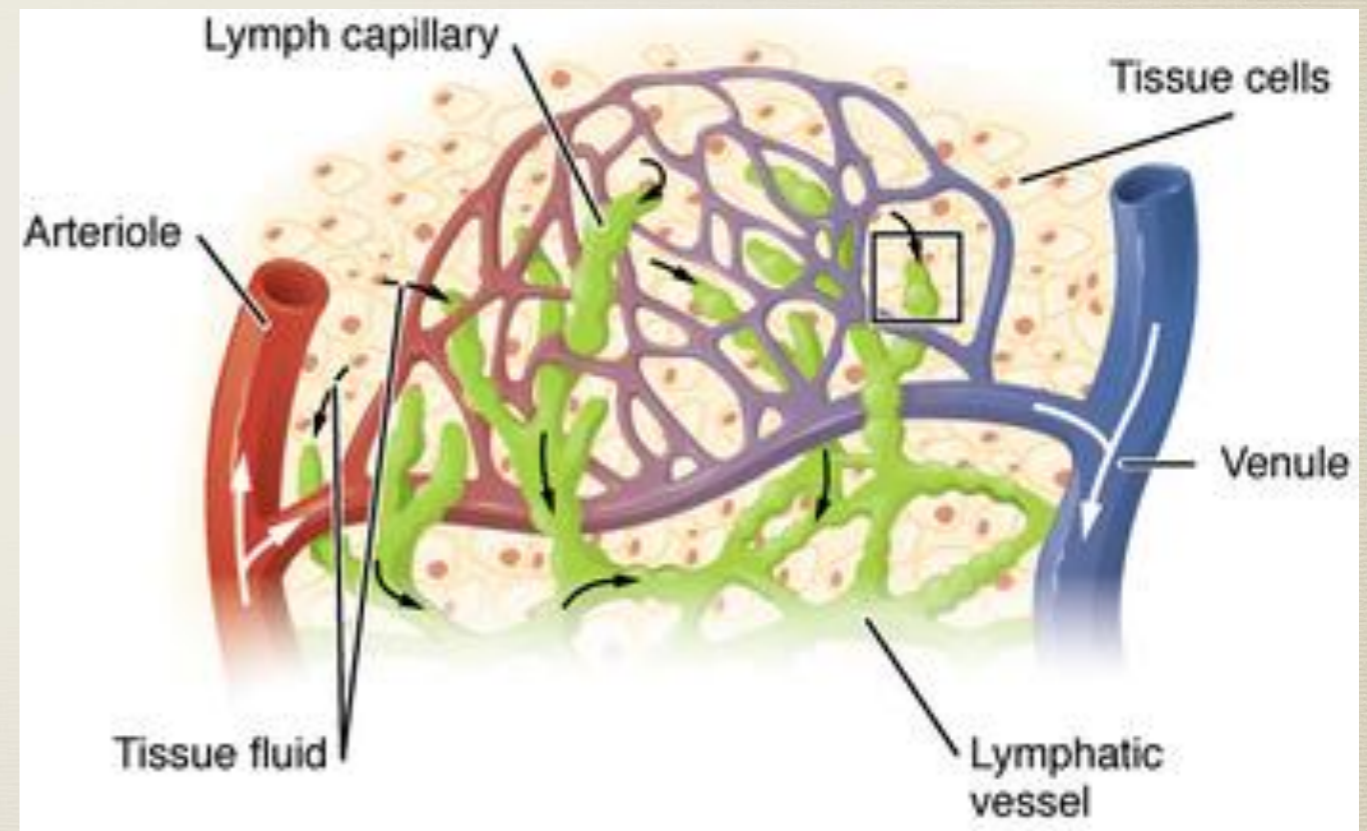
Lymphatic system

- * Comprised of lymph nodes and a network of lymphatic vessels spread throughout the body
- * Plays an important role in fighting infection
- * Helps transport substances (hormones, fats, waste products from cells) around the body



Function of lymphatics

- * Initial lymphatics are situated just beneath surface of the skin and help to remove waste products from the tissues and transport fluid back into the circulation
- * Responsible for moving about 3 litres of fluid each day



What is Lymphoedema?

- * Accumulation of fluid in the tissues caused by a failure of the lymphatics
- * Can affect anywhere in the body - limbs, trunk, head - depending on what part of the lymphatic system is affected
- * Some people are born with deficient lymphatic systems (primary Lymphoedema) others develop swelling following damage to the lymphatic system (secondary Lymphoedema)
- * Lymphatics can be damaged by surgery, infection, radiotherapy
- * Cancer - and the treatment for cancer - is one of the most common causes of secondary lymphoedema

Incidence of cancer related lymphoedema

- * Exact figures are difficult to determine but estimates suggest approx 450,000 people in the UK have lymphoedema of all aetiology, no reliable data to determine numbers with cancer related lymphoedema
- * Some cancers carry a greater risk, and the more extensive the treatment the higher the risk
- * Impossible to say with certainty who will or won't be affected
- * Can develop at any time following treatment - weeks, months or years later
- * Likely to see increasing numbers due to better survival rates, ageing population



Advice for reducing the risk

- * Keep skin in good condition, wash and dry carefully and moisturise daily
- * Avoid sun burn, extremes of heat and cold, steam rooms, saunas etc
- * Remain active and keep to a healthy weight
- * Avoid tight and restrictive clothing and jewellery
- * Protect skin from damage ie insect bites, blisters etc

Early signs

- * Heaviness or aching - maybe worse at the end of the day
- * Tightness or dryness of the skin
- * Swelling that comes and goes - may affect one or both legs and/or pelvic region
- * “Marking” from clothing

What can be done?

- * Lymphoedema is considered to be a long term condition, however it can be successfully managed
- * Management of symptoms relies on '4 cornerstones': Skincare, exercise, lymphatic drainage, compression
- * Early recognition and prompt management improve outcomes
- * Vital to consider lifestyle and use a personalised approach

Exercise

- * Specific exercises encourage lymph drainage
- * General activity encourages lymph drainage
- * Breathing exercises stimulate deep lymphatics
- * Outdated advice to avoid movement



Compression

- * Garments - in a variety of styles
- * Velcro wraps
- * Bandages
- * Designed to stop too much fluid from leaking into tissues, and work with muscle activity to return fluid to the circulation
- * Worn for all of the day, or during certain activities
- * Correct fit is essential
- * Specially designed night garments are also available
- * Most garments are available on prescription

More information

- * Lymphoedema Support Network - support for patients and advice for professionals - www.lymphoedema.org
- * British Lymphology Society - www.thebls.com
- * Charities such as Jane Scarth House in Romsey and Wessex Cancer Support
- * Specialist nursing team - referral to lymphoedema services
- * Macmillan, cancer support charities