

Diseases of the Lymphatic and Immune Systems

LYMPHATIC SYSTEM

Elephantiasis—a condition in which blockage of lymphatic vessels results in enormous enlargement of body parts (e.g., legs, scrotum); the end stage of filariasis.

Cause: filarial infection.

Contraindications/indications: obtain approval of client's doctor before performing bodywork.

Infectious mononucleosis (kissing disease)—a contagious disease spread through direct contact; produces swollen lymph nodes and submandibular glands as well as sore throat, fever, rash, overall fatigue, and an enlarged spleen and liver; most common in people 15 to 35 years of age.

Cause: Epstein-Barr virus infection.

Contraindications/indications: all bodywork is contraindicated until the client's doctor gives approval.

Splenomegaly—enlargement of the spleen; may be up to 10 times the normal size.

Causes: mononucleosis; malaria; toxemia.

Contraindications/indications: obtain approval of client's doctor before performing bodywork; avoid abdominal area, especially around the spleen; all **massage** should be light.

Lymphedema—an accumulation of fluid, proteins, and fibrosis in the extremities secondary to the impairment of the lymph vessels; results in varying degrees of swelling, from mild swelling to severe disabling enlargement of a limb.

Cause: destruction or surgical removal of lymph vessels (most commonly from cases of breast cancer, tumor removal, or radiation therapy).

Contraindications/indications: **massage** can play a critical role in reducing edema, but bodywork must be done very slowly and firmly, with the affected limb elevated to remove fluids from affected limb; obtain advice and approval of client's doctor before performing any bodywork to make sure patient does not have congestive heart failure, deep vein thrombosis, and/or active infection.

Hodgkin disease—a type of malignant lymphoma; causes decreased lymphoid function, which leads to decreased T-cell function and immunodeficiency; progresses in stages; usually arises in cervical lymph nodes; most frequently affects young adults; signs and symptoms include splenomegaly, anemia, fatigue, fever, and overall body wasting.

Cause: cancer in lymphatic structures.

Contraindications/indications: obtain approval of client's doctor before performing bodywork.

IMMUNE SYSTEM

Rejection—occurs when a transplanted tissue is attacked and broken down by the host's immune system.

Cause: natural immune response involving the production of antibodies, white blood cells, and T cells against foreign tissue.

Contraindications/indications: consult with client's doctor.

Allergy—hypersensitivity to a particular allergen (foreign agent, food, drug) usually considered harmless; may cause bronchial or sinus congestion, runny nose, pruritus (itching), nausea, or even serious systemic reactions such as anaphylactic shock; affects more than 15% of the population of the United States; treatment usually includes antihistamine drugs.

Cause: genetically influenced hypersensitive immune system.

Contraindications/indications: massage is generally indicated; use caution when client is on medication or having an allergic reaction.

Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS)—a group of disorders characterized by the destruction of the immune system that leaves the person unable to fight infections and cancer; very high incidence among homosexuals and drug users; mortality rate exceeds 80%; signs and symptoms include fatigue, fever, weight loss, and splenomegaly.

Causes: human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection that destroys T helper cells, thus inactivating the immune system; Hodgkin disease; various other diseases.

Contraindications/indications: always use universal precautions; obtain advice and approval of client's doctor before performing bodywork.