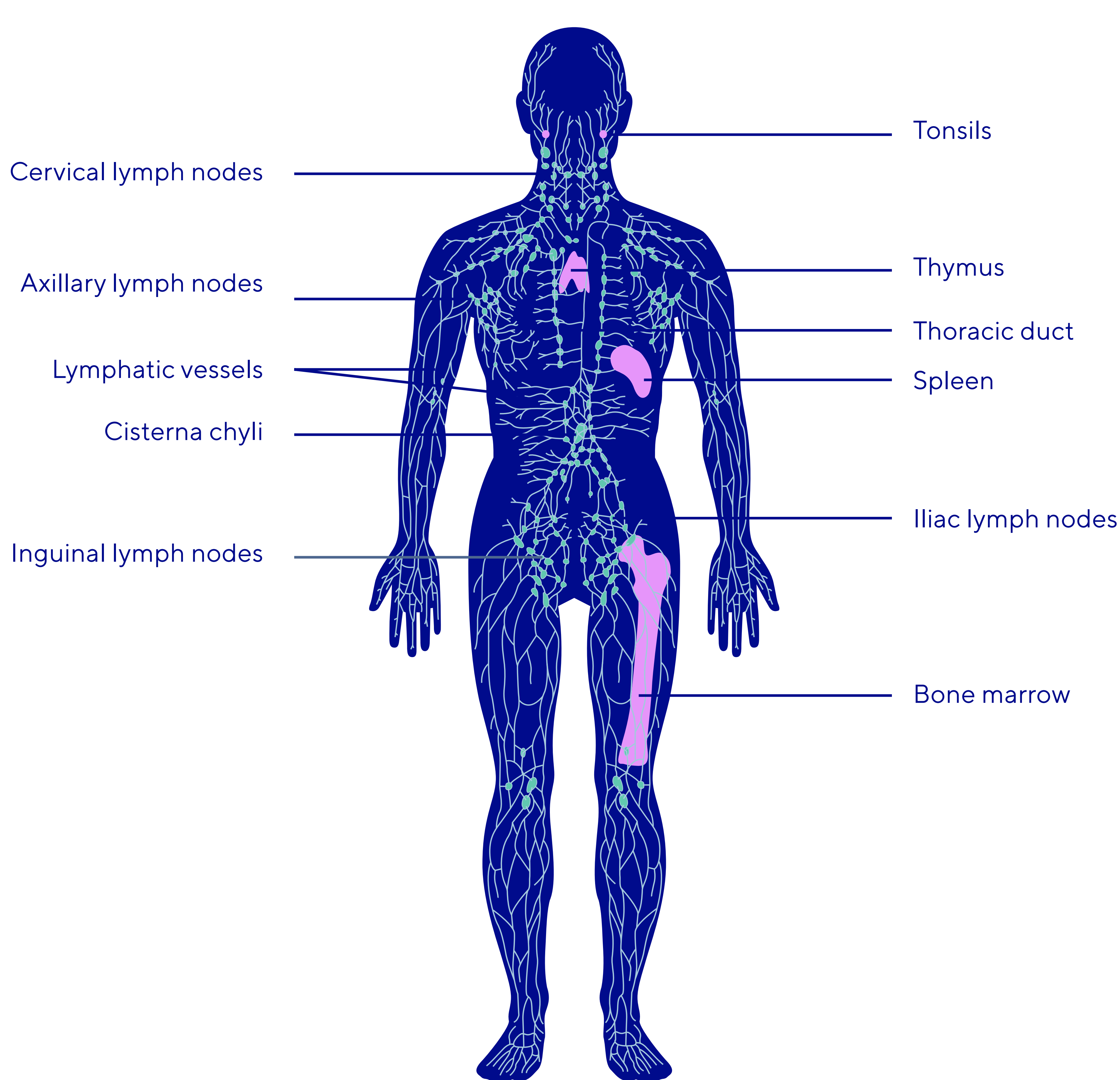


THE LYMPHATIC SYSTEM

Lymphedema is the result of malfunction of the lymphatic system leading to increased volume of one or more limbs and/or the external genitalia⁽¹⁾.

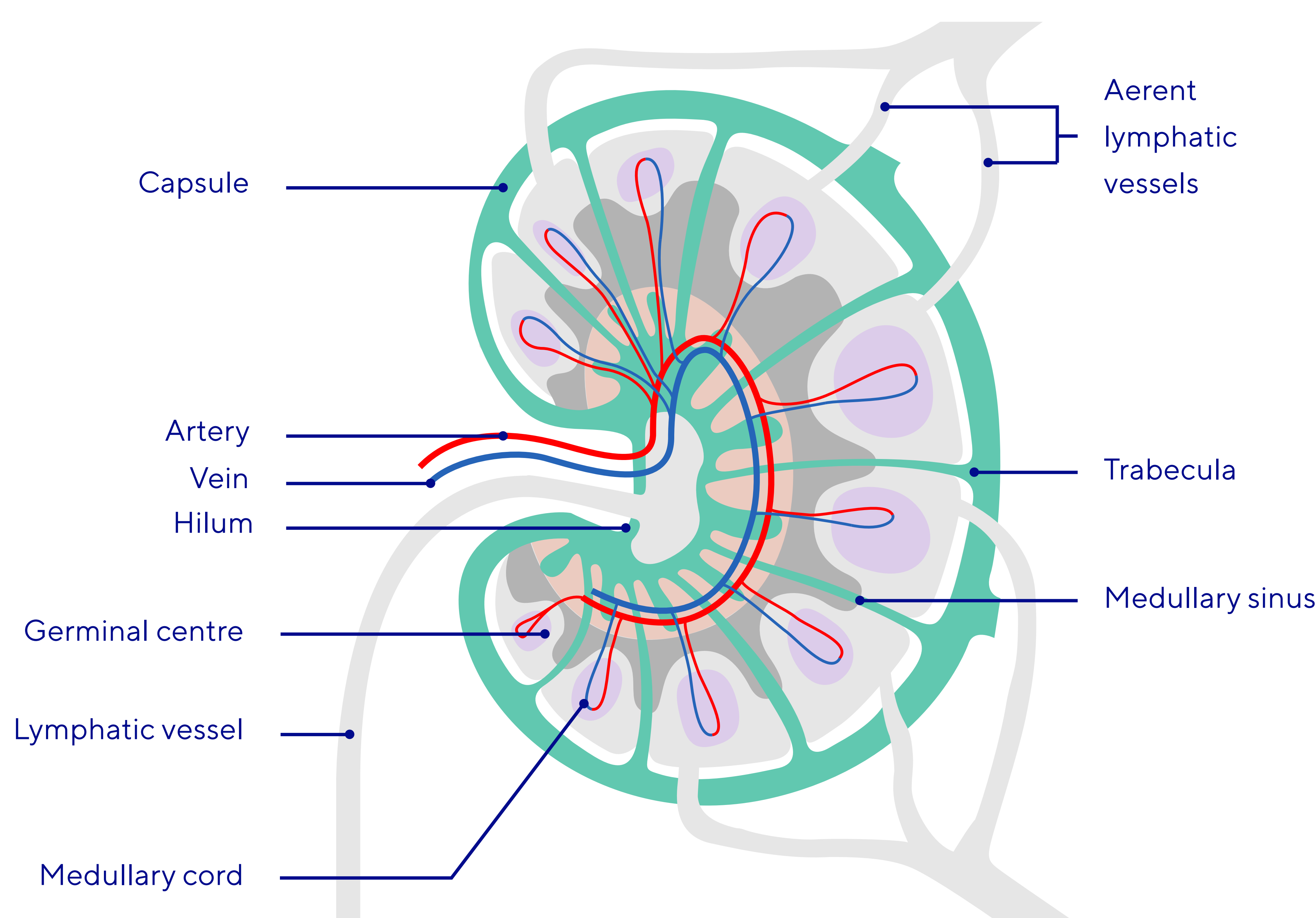
The lymphatic system

Made up of a series of narrow channels called lymphatic vessels, the lymphatic system helps protect the body against disease and infection. It is the most important part of the immune system⁽²⁾.



Lymph nodes

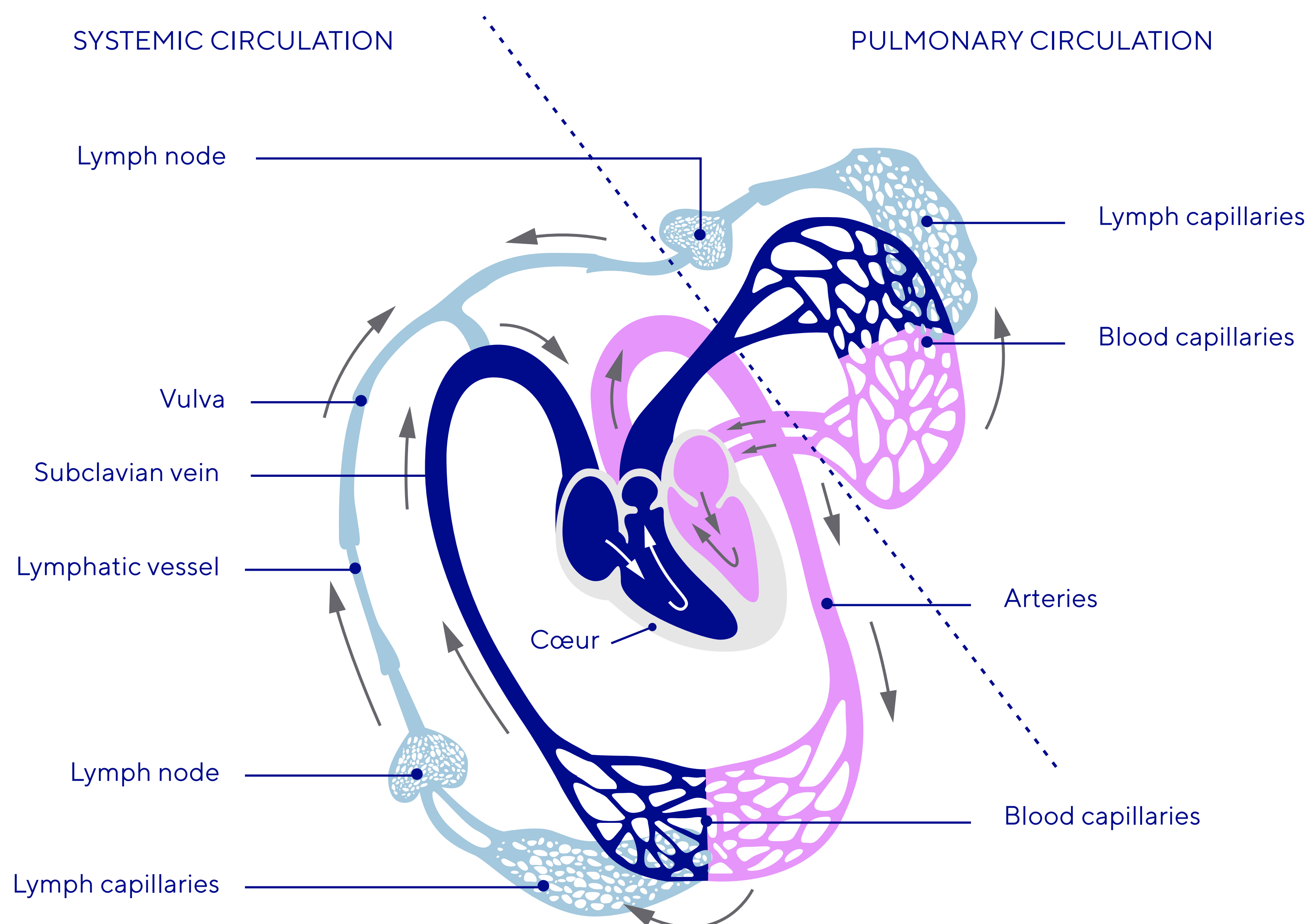
This extensive network, present throughout the body (except in the brain, muscles, cartilage and bone marrow), is composed of lymph nodes: clusters of small bean-shaped organs. There are thousands of lymph nodes distributed throughout the body. They are usually located along veins and arteries⁽²⁾.



The lymphatic circulation

The lymphatic vessels, which form a network throughout the body, carry a fluid that contains white blood cells (or lymphocytes): this fluid is lymph⁽²⁾.

It is filtered by the lymph nodes and some of the organs, such as the spleen, tonsils, bone marrow and thymus, to extract any bacteria, viruses or other foreign substances⁽²⁾.



What is lymphedema?

The great majority of lymphedema cases are caused by impairment of the lymphatic system, impeding its circulation, due to a malformation (primary lymphedema) or injury (secondary lymphedema)⁽¹⁾.

SOURCES

- (1) La compression médicale dans le traitement du lymphœdème. [Medical compression in the treatment of lymphedema]. Haute Autorité de Santé [French National Authority for Health] website
- (2) Le système lymphatique [The lymphatic system]. Institut national du cancer [French national cancer institute] website