

Possible causes of Edema

Edema is caused by either systemic diseases, or by local conditions involving just the affected extremities.

Common systemic diseases associated with edema involve the heart and circulatory system, liver, kidneys and endocrine system (diabetes, thyroid disease).

Venous Insufficiency is a common cause of leg edema, when the veins are unable to effectively move blood against gravity back to the heart. Causing reduced blood flow to the legs and feet. Reduced blood flow can result in mild to severe leg heaviness and aching, varicose veins, edema, recurrent skin infections and ulcerations.

When there is an excess of sodium in the tissues, the body dilutes it by retaining water.

Women will often retain water a week prior to the onset of menstruation due to the drop in progesterone levels. Pregnancy can also cause edema.

Prescription and over the counter drugs can cause edema. These may include blood pressure medications, estrogen, calcium channel blockers, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, Thiazolidinediones, corticosteroids, anabolic and androgenic steroids.

Medical conditions that can cause edema include: congestive heart failure, kidney disease, thyroid or liver disease, malnutrition (including low protein levels), chronic lung diseases such as chronic bronchitis.

Conditions causing swelling in one leg may include: blood clots, weakened veins, infection and inflammation, lymphedema, and tumors.

Food allergies may cause edema.

Chronic Edema & Pitted Edema

Causes the skin to become more fragile. Wounds may heal more slowly and are at greater risk for infection including cellulitis and gangrene.

Untreated venous insufficiency causes a progressive decline resulting in pain, swelling, skin changes including thickening and eventual tissue, decreased oxygen delivery to the tissues. Stagnation of fluids and toxins in the body. There are many reasons edema should not be ignored.

When to Seek Medical Attention

Call 911 if:

If you experience a shortness of breath. Edema is associated with congestive heart failure.

If you have chest pain, especially if it feels like pressure or tightness.

Call your doctor if:

- Urination has decreased.
- You have a history of liver disease.
- The swollen area is red or warm to the touch.
- You have a fever.
- If pits remain when pressing on the swollen area, this can be a sign of serious health conditions.
- If pregnant and have more than mild swelling or have a sudden increase in swelling.
- If self-care measures, including water pills do not help or swelling worsens contact your physician right away.

Pitted Edema

Occurs when the swollen area retains an indentation when pressed that may persist for as long as 20 minutes. The only cure for edema is addressing the cause. It can be treated with diuretics, but this will not cure. Frequent use of diuretics may cause rebound edema and may actually make the problem worse, they also can cause electrolyte deficiency, particularly potassium. Pitted edema should not be treated exclusively at home, please consult with your physician.



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Edema & Pitted Edema

A Symptom of an Underlying Problem

Holistic Help for Water Retention



Are You Risking More Serious Damage?

Balancing Bodily Fluids

What is Edema?

Edema is the accumulation of fluid in the tissue spaces between the cells in the soft tissue of the body. Swelling appears most often the face, arms, legs and feet, but can be anywhere in the body. Edema is usually a symptom of an underlying condition. The condition must be addressed to clear up the symptoms.

Where there is a tendency to retain water look to the adrenal glands and kidneys, the circulatory system and possibly the heart.

Preventive Measures

Salt: Reduce salt intake. Replace table salt with mineral rich sea salt. Experiment with sea weed seasons like dulse and kelp mixed with sesame seeds and other herbs.

Fluids: Increase water intake, dehydration can make edema worse. Avoid sweet drinks like soda, fruit juice and sweetened tea which cause the kidneys to work harder contributing to the build up of fluid in the tissues.

Movement: Avoid sitting or standing for long periods of time. Stretch your legs often. Move around. Exercise feet and lower legs while sitting, this helps the veins move blood back towards the heart. Exercise regularly. Sweating helps to flush out excess fluids and salts. Massage helps keep fluids moving.

Body Burden: Lose weight if you need to, being overweight slows fluid circulation and puts extra pressure on the veins.

Don't Bind: Avoid wearing restrictive clothing. Wear support or compression stockings to improve blood flow.

When Resting: Elevate the swollen appendage above the heart while resting. Use pillows under legs and arms to help encourage drainage of excess fluid.

Success with Change: Lifestyle modifications are essential for reversing edema.

Home Care

Elevate the legs above the heart while laying down. Exercise the legs. This helps to move the fluid back into the circulatory system and out of the tissues. Wear support or compression stockings. Discuss options with your doctor to prevent skin breakdown, such as a pressure reducing mattress.

Herbs and Supplementation

Use herbal diuretics with caution if currently using pharmaceutical diuretics, the combination may cause dehydration. Also, if using "water pills" be sure to supplement potassium to avoid deficiency. Herbal diuretics gently increase urine flow, many tone the kidneys and are high in potassium and other minerals.

- Nettle leaf infusion nourishes the kidneys and adrenal glands. It has a high vitamin and mineral content and is rich in potassium and iron. 1 tsp dried herb per cup of boiled water, steep for 15 min, strain and drink 3 times a day. Safe to use for months at a time.
- Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) - improves circulation and digestion when taken with meals, nourishes and tones the liver and assists gallbladder function, a diuretic rich in potassium, blood cleanser. Safe to use for up to 4 to 6 weeks.
- Buchu (*Agathosma betulina*) - an effective diuretic and anti-inflammatory.
- Motherwort—strengthen the hear, specific for fluid retention in the legs and feet.
- Corn Silk tea—mild diuretic. 1 tsp/cup of boiled water, 3x/day for 4 days.
- Other herbs that may be considered for the appropriateness of the individual's current condition: uva ursi, hawthorn berries, butcher's broom, ginkgo biloba, bilberry and marshmallow.
- Supplementation: B-complex (reduces water retention), replace lost minerals: potassium (needed for heart function and to keep fluids inside the cells), magnesium, calcium and zinc (mineral balance is essential for water balance). Vitamin C (adrenal function, tissue repair), Vitamin E (aids circulation), Alfalfa (minerals).

Food Choices

Consume foods high in potassium such as bananas, dandelion, parsley, cucumber, watermelon. Freely consume artichokes, cantaloupe, watermelon, garlic, dill, brown rice, asparagus, grapes, green tea, dark leafy greens and cucumber. Take in plenty of fiber, lean protein and vegetables.

Avoid: Alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, sugar, dairy products, soy sauce, animal protein, beef, fried foods, gravies, chocolate, olives, pickles, white flour, white sugar and other salty foods.

Recipes for Water Balance:

Cucumber Cooler

- 1 tomato
- 1 cucumber (organic or peeled)
- 2 stalks of organic celery
- Parsley sprigs

Juice tomato, pour juice into ice cube tray and freeze. Juice cucumber and celery. Pour juice into tall glass, add tomato cubes, and garnish with a sprig of parsley.



Folk Remedy Diuretic

- 2 large apples, seeded
 - 1/2 tsp. horseradish
- Juice apples and mix with horseradish. Drink three times a day.



Sweet Potassium Shake

- 1/4 cantaloupe
 - 1 banana
 - 3-4 Tbsp soy protein powder
- Juice cantaloupe. Place juice, soy protein and banana in blender or food processor, and blend until smooth, add ice if you wish.



Body Cleanser

- 1/2 cucumber (organic or peeled)
 - 1/2 beet
 - 1 apple, seeded
 - 4 carrots
- Push cucumber, beet and apple through hopper with carrots.

