

Natural Help 4... Edema



What is Edema?

Edema is the **noticeable swelling** resulting from **fluid accumulation in certain body tissues**. It is most commonly found in the feet, ankles and legs, although it may also affect the face, hands and other parts of the body and organs. Pregnant women and older adults are often affected with this condition, but **it can happen to anyone**.

The swelling is brought about by the **build-up of excess fluid** beneath the skin in the spaces within the body tissues that are outside of the blood vessels. These spaces are called interstitial spaces or compartments.

Types of Edema

Clinically, there are two types of **edema** – **pitting and non-pitting edema**. **Pitting edema** is the term used to describe **edema** when pressure applied to the skin of the swollen area is released and an indentation is left behind (e.g. when the skin is pressed with a finger or when stockings or socks induce indentation). **Non-pitting edema** is the term used to describe **edema** when this pressure-induced indentation does not occur. **Non-pitting edema** usually occurs in the arms and legs.

Occasionally, **pitting edema and non-pitting edema** can occur without an underlying disease, and it is then known as idiopathic **edema**. This is most common in women who experience it in their legs and feet when they are pre-menstrual or pre-menopausal – it is then often known as cyclical **edema**.

Diagnosing Edema

Pitting and **non-pitting edema diagnosis is determined by the symptoms during a physical examination**. The doctor will examine the skin over the swollen area to check whether it may be stretched or shiny. By pushing gently on the swollen area for approximately 15 seconds, a dimple or indentation may be caused. Additional tests such as a urine test, blood test, a chest X-ray and electrocardiogram (ECG) may also be performed to confirm the cause of the **edema**.

Edema itself is usually a symptom of an underlying condition and can be noticed as swelling or puffiness of your face, hands, feet, legs, or around the eyes. Amongst others, **edema can indicate disease of the heart, liver, thyroid, lymphatic system or kidneys** (causing salt retention).

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Never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have read in this eBook or on ANY website.

If you experience **shortness of breath, chest pain, redness or heat in a swollen edematous area, or a swelling of only one limb**, consult a doctor immediately. Also, pregnant women who notice signs of **edema** should seek medical help. Because **edema can be a symptom of a serious underlying disorder** and can cause serious consequences, it is always important to seek medical advice.

What Causes Edema?

There are many factors that can contribute to the **causes of edema**. Since it is often related to an underlying condition, it's important to get a proper diagnosis to be sure of the cause.

Possible Causes of Edema

- Standing or sitting for long periods of time particularly in hot weather can cause excess fluid to accumulate in feet, ankles and lower legs.
- Eating food with a high salt content.
- Being largely overweight or obese. **Excess weight** can put added pressure on the knee and ankle joints and the lower limbs.
- Congestive heart failure is a condition in which the heart can no longer pump efficiently, and causes **fluid buildup in the lungs and other parts of the body**. Swelling is often most visible in the feet and ankles.
- High blood pressure, liver, kidney and thyroid diseases can cause **edema**
- Severe chronic (long-term) lung diseases, including emphysema and chronic bronchitis, increase pressure in the blood vessels that lead from the heart to the lungs. This pressure backs up in the heart and the higher pressure causes swelling in the legs and feet.
- Tiny valves inside the veins of the legs can become weakened, causing a common problem called **venous insufficiency**. This makes it more difficult for the veins to pump blood back to the heart, and leads to varicose veins and a buildup of fluid.
- Pregnancy can cause **edema** in the legs as the uterus puts pressure on the vena cava (a major blood vessel that returns blood to the heart from the legs) and progesterone relaxes the walls of the blood vessels. **Fluid retention during pregnancy** also can be caused by a more serious condition called pre-eclampsia.
- Low protein levels in the blood caused by malnutrition, kidney and liver disease can also cause **edema**. The proteins help to hold water inside the blood vessels so fluid does not leak out into the tissues. If the blood protein albumin gets too low, fluid leaks out the blood vessels and **edema** occurs--especially in the feet, ankles and lower legs.

Help for Edema

Depending on the **causes of edema** and whether it is temporary or permanent, **treating edema** usually focuses on **treating the condition that is causing it**. A low dose of a diuretic (water pill) may be prescribed to reduce the swelling and help you expel the excess fluid, but it is **important to remember this just treats the symptoms**, and is not necessarily addressing the cause.

If a blocked or damaged blood vessel is suspected as one of the **causes of edema**,



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Michele Carelse, Clinical Psychologist



All of our natural remedies are formulated by our expert team of herbalists, naturopaths and homeopaths, and headed by Michele Carelse.

Michele has had years of experience in the manufacturing and use of natural remedies. In addition, she is a trained Clinical Psychologist and has been incorporating natural remedies into her treatment of patients with depression, anxiety, ADD, ADHD and stress for many years with spectacular results.

surgery may be needed to improve the flow of blood. **Treating edema** should include protecting any swollen, edematous areas of the body from pressure, injury and extreme temperatures. The skin over swollen areas becomes more fragile over time. Cuts, scrapes and burns in areas that have [edema](#) take much longer to heal and are open to infection.

Natural Remedies for Edema

Treating edema with natural and holistic remedies can also provide **rapid relief for swelling** and improve the blood flow through the veins. Using homeopathic and herbal remedies is a safer, gentler alternative that can improve overall health. Herbs such as Agathosma betulina (buchu) offer **effective diuretic and anti-inflammatory properties** and have been used by the indigenous people of South Africa for centuries. Taraxacum officinale (Dandelion) and Olea europea help to balance blood pressure, assist liver and gallbladder functioning, and improve circulation.

Tips for the Prevention of Edema

- Follow a low-salt diet.
- Avoid drinking too many fluids.
- If you are overweight or obese, try to lose weight and reduce the pressure on your lower limbs and joints.
- Elevate your legs above the level of your heart to keep swelling down and improve blood flow.
- If your ankles and feet are swollen during pregnancy, keep your legs elevated, and lie on your side rather than your back.
- When you do lie down, place a pillow under your legs.
- Wear support or compression stockings to improve the flow of blood through the veins.
- Avoid leg swelling on long trips by standing up and walking around often, or get up every hour.
- Exercise your feet and lower legs while sitting, as this will help the veins move blood back toward the heart.
- Avoid smoking and drinking alcohol.

The Natural Approach

While Western medicine has become the norm in many cultures, it is **not the only treatment option**. Conventional Western medicine (often called allopathic or orthodox medicine) is the system of medicine taught at most medical schools, and many pharmaceutical and synthetic medicines are manufactured and marketed according to the principles of allopathic medicine.

Because most of us in the Western world have grown up in a society in which allopathic medicine is the prevailing norm, we forget that only a few decades ago, homeopathic, herbal and other natural medicines were commonly available and freely used-- even by conventional doctors. While there are often heated debates about which system of medicine is 'better' than the other, many responsible doctors (whether they are allopathic or not) recognize that **both have a role to play in the treatment program**.

Natural medicine has often been frowned upon by conventional doctors, especially

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by those who do not have sufficient knowledge of these medicines. However, it is encouraging to note that some medical schools are now beginning to re-introduce it into their course work, thereby **providing doctors with a wider range of treatment options** from which to choose. In many countries, especially in Europe, India and China, **natural and homeopathic medicines are commonly prescribed** by conventional doctors and represent a significant part of the total annual drug sales.

Naturopathy is a branch of medicine (just as allopathy is a branch of medicine) which operates according to the underlying philosophy that the **body has an innate capacity to heal itself**. While natural medicines are often called 'alternative' or 'complimentary' medicines, they are, in fact, a **unique and independent form of medicine** in their own right, well able to **treat a variety of conditions**. Perhaps the term 'holistic' medicine is more apt, given the broad range of treatment options and approaches which are to be found within the practice of natural medicine. This encompasses many different disciplines, including herbalism, homeopathy, iridology, osteopathy, chiropractic, therapeutic massage techniques, aromatherapy, acupuncture and many, many more.

Most naturopaths will use a variety of treatment modalities in order to treat their patients in a **holistic way to support health, relieve symptoms and prevent future disease**. In fact, even the World Health Organization defines health as being "... more than simply the absence of illness. It is the active state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being." This is a wonderfully clear description of holistic or natural medicine, which strives to **support health** (thereby relieving or preventing symptoms), rather than simply eliminating disease.

Although allopathic medicine certainly has a role to play and has made a tremendous contribution to medical science during the past century, there is a growing perception that it is not the only answer. In many cases, **holistic medicine can accomplish just as much**, if not more – without the risk of side effects, addiction and sacrifice to health so commonly associated with pharmaceutical drugs. Contrary to common perception, and provided that they are manufactured in the correct way, **natural medicines can work quickly and safely to promote healing**.

In many cases, they can **succeed where pharmaceutical drugs have failed**. Despite frequent reports that they are 'unproven' and 'untested', the opposite is true. Natural medicines have a **long history of usage** and there is a **wealth of empirical evidence** to support their effectiveness and safety. In addition, active clinical research is carried out by many academic hospitals and universities to **support the extensive traditional and empirical evidence behind natural medicines**.

It is also important to know that, like any medicine, herbal and homeopathic medicines **must be manufactured in the correct way**, following acceptable procedures and manufacturing methods to ensure maximum effectiveness and safety. Due to the recent rise in popularity of natural remedies, many companies have sprung up to take advantage of the market. Unfortunately, **not all of them are equipped to manufacture to the correct standards**, often resulting in a flood of inferior (and sometimes even unsafe) remedies onto the market – and giving natural remedies a bad name.

Even some pharmaceutical companies have rushed to claim their market share by



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producing so-called 'standardized' extracts of herbs and offering these as superior to the tried and tested methods of naturopathic manufacturing. Nothing could be further from the truth. While '**standardized**' extracts may offer benefit of easy consistency of dosage (and cheaper more efficient production lines), they have **grave disadvantages**, including an increase in side effects, as the medicines produced in this manner lose the natural protective properties of the herbs. In some cases, these side effects have proved fatal – as was seen in the liver toxicity associated with standardized extracts of kava kava, a herb previously safely used for generations without any known side effects.

Most naturopaths recommend what is called the Full Spectrum Method of extraction – which **retains the benefits of ALL the active ingredients within the herb** as opposed to isolating only one – thereby providing a more complete treatment as well as superior protection against side effects.

Whatever your choice, **always choose wisely**. Research what is best for you. If you have a chronic or life-threatening condition, don't make changes without first discussing them with your doctor, in order that your condition may be monitored. **Well-informed and supportive practitioners will support patients** who want to take responsibility for their own health.

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