

## *Orthopaedic Connection*

### **Don't Ignore Leg Swelling**

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#### *Transforming patient information into patient understanding.*

As a doctor I refer to swelling in the feet and lower legs as edema, more specifically peripheral edema. The anatomy and physiology of this is fairly complicated, but I'll try to demystify it. OK, here goes.

#### **Cause**

Fluid in your legs and feet is supposed to stay in the tiny blood capillaries and lymph channels in the tissue structure of your feet, ankles and lower legs.

If an imbalance happens the capillaries can begin to leak and fluid can begin to accumulate in tissues. I'll explain soon how this can occur.

Swelling typically affects both legs. If the swelling is only in one leg it is related to some problem from the groin to the lower leg and ankle that needs to be identified.

#### **Causes**

I of course have to do a physical exam to sort out the possible causes of swelling in the feet and ankles.

I see lots of patients who have the condition which is usually associated with some specific Orthopaedic condition that I am treating.

Besides a physical exam certain laboratory tests, EKG, Chest x-ray and even Ultrasound may be needed to determine the cause of the swelling.

#### **Mild Swelling Causes**

- Eating too much salt recently
- Older patients are more susceptible to swollen legs
- Excess weight
- Standing or even sitting for an extended time
- Certain drugs. There are many, but a few more common are steroids, NSAIDS, Lyrica and certain diabetes drugs.

#### **More Serious Causes**

The recognition of these serious causes is something Orthopaedic Surgeons need to know, but the treatment is mostly in the hands of Internal Medicine physicians.

- Deep Vein Thrombosis (blood clots). Usually affects only one leg.
- Congestive Heart Failure
- Cirrhosis (scarring of the liver)
- Chronic kidney disease
- Cancer (tumors)
- Lymphatic system damage

#### **Don't Delay**

Since some of the causes of swelling of the legs are less serious and many of them are very serious don't ignore symptoms unless you are certain of the cause. Delay can put you in peril, so I strongly advise you to see medical evaluation before it's too late.

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Dr. Haverbush