

Orthopaedic Connection

Why Do Legs Swell?

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Medically speaking swelling (in this case legs, ankles, and feet) is referred to as edema.

First, you wonder why your shoes are fitting sort of tight. Then maybe you think your ankles are a little puffy and your calves somewhat tight. You say "well, I did have a long day on my feet. That is no doubt the cause".

But is it?

Could this be something more serious?

Edema can affect any part of your body even your entire body - but it is most commonly noticed in the legs.

Edema can have causes ranging from inactivity such as standing or sitting for long periods to heart conditions for example heart failure. It can also be due to kidney disease.

Fluid Out Of Balance

Fluid moves through the walls of blood vessels into body tissue to hydrate and nourish cells.

Some fluids are removed from tissue by lymph channels, which take the fluid through lymph nodes and then back to venous circulation.

Kidneys determine how much fluid is in your body. Too much, kidneys filter it out. Not enough, kidneys keep fluids as well as sodium.

Edema begins when capillaries leak water into body tissue such as your feet and ankles. Increased pressure in capillaries prevents fluids from being reabsorbed into the blood stream.

Simple Ordinary Causes

Sitting or standing a long time causes blood pooling in the legs and increased capillary pressure.

Hot weather expands blood vessels making fluid easier to leak out.

Eating too much salty food.

Hormone fluctuation with menstruation.

Weakened or damaged leg veins impair blood flow out of the legs.

Side effect of medication

Certain blood pressure medications

Vasodilators

Hormones

Certain anti-inflammatory drugs

Some herbal supplements

Serious Medical Conditions

Blood clots
Heart failure
Liver damage
Kidney disease
Thyroid trouble
Malabsorption of the intestine

Should you see your Doctor?

This is what I advise my patients. Most ordinary causes of edema are short lived and have a cause you can identify such as sitting for a long period or an especially salty meal. If you don't have any other symptoms like shortness of breath and it goes away in 24 hours you probably don't need to visit your doctor.

I'm afraid we are out of time this week, but we need to continue next time with proper treatment if the condition is not better in 24 hours.

Our goal is quality, highest standards and best outcomes.

Office Website and Gratiot County Herald Archive

Wow! Your window to the Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal world opens at www.orthopodsurgeon.com. It contains the Website Library of information, Your Orthopaedic Connection and GCH archive of all previous articles.

You will be amazed at all the helpful information it contains.

All of the information pertains to everything I treat in the office and hospital.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush