

STEINBERG PODIATRY ASSOCIATES, P.A.

EDEMA

What is Edema?

Edema or swelling of the foot, ankle, and leg is a common problem. Congestive heart Failure is a common cause of edema secondary to fluid volume overload. This is classically a non-discolored leg with pitting edema. Pitting edema is when you can press on your ankle firmly with one finger and the impression from your finger remains after pressure is released. Another common cause of edema is venous stasis or varicose veins. This edema is usually accompanied by discoloration of the skin. The hemosiderin or iron in the venous blood leaks out of the vein and stains the skin of the lower leg light red-brown in a splotchy pattern which is more concentrated at the lower leg. These are commonly referred to as liver spots. Edema can lead to infection, ulceration, or blood clots if not treated. Things to watch for are bright red streaking going up the leg, heat, and calf pain.

How is it treated?

Edema is most commonly managed with a diuretic or water pill such as Lasix (furosimide) when there is a fluid volume problem such as with congestive heart failure. Compression is effective for many forms of edema and can be accomplished with compression wraps similar to ace bandages applied from the foot to calf. Compression stockings are also used and come in many forms from over the counter athletic support stockings and support panty hose to prescription custom made garments. Physical therapy with manual lymph drainage is employed in some cases.

What can I do?

Never cross your legs as this blocks the return flow of veins and lymph channels. Elevate legs when sitting, avoid standing in one place for prolonged periods, and take a break in the middle of your day just to elevate your legs. Walking is good for improved circulation. Any exercise that uses the calf muscle will help pump out the extra fluid in the legs. The calf muscle can be exercised when sitting or lying down by mimicking the motion of applying pressure to the accelerator on an automobile and releasing. If removable compression wraps or compression stockings are being used they should be put on first thing in the morning and taken off the last thing before bed.