

Fluid Retention During Cancer Treatment

What is fluid retention?

Fluid retention (edema) means your body is storing extra water. It may cause:

- Swelling, most often in the hands, lower legs, and feet.
- An increase in weight, even if you don't eat extra food.

A side effect of cancer treatment may be edema. If it occurs, it often appears after several treatments. This edema will go away within weeks or months after treatment is stopped.

If you have any questions or concerns, please ask your doctor or nurse.

What are some of the symptoms of fluid retention?

Signs include:

- Feet and lower legs appear larger.
- Your feet, ankles, and hands look swollen. If you press on the skin with your finger, there is an indentation that stays for a few seconds.
- Your face looks puffy.
- Hands feel tight when you make a fist.
- Rings are too tight.
- Shoes are too tight.
- Abdomen looks swollen and distended.
- Shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing (especially when lying flat).

What are some of the things you can do to manage fluid retention?

- Keep your feet elevated as much as you can.
- Avoid standing for long periods of time.
- Do not wear tight clothing.
- Do not cross your legs.
- Avoid prepared foods that have high levels of salt (sodium). Low sodium is less than 140 milligrams per serving.
- Limit the amount of salt in cooking and at meal times.
- You may be asked to wear special support stockings.
- If the problem is severe, your doctor may prescribe a medicine called a diuretic. Diuretics help your body get rid of excess fluids.

Contact your doctor if you:

- Have an increase in shortness of breath.
- Are feeling more tired.
- Wake up with swelling in your ankles or around your eyes.
- Notice a weight gain so that your clothes do not fit.
- Have swelling in only one leg.

Northwestern Medicine – Health Information Resources

For more information, contact Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Alberto Culver Health Learning Center (HLC) at hlc@nm.org, or by calling 312.926.5465. You may also visit the HLC on the 3rd floor, Galter Pavilion at 251 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL. Health information professionals can help you find the information you need and provide you with personal support at no charge.

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at nm.org.

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.

The entities that come together as Northwestern Medicine are committed to representing the communities we serve, fostering a culture of inclusion, delivering culturally competent care, providing access to treatment and programs in a nondiscriminatory manner and eliminating healthcare disparities. For questions, please call either Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Patient Representatives Department at 312.926.3112, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363, the Northwestern Lake Forest Patient Relations manager at 847.535.8282 and/or the Northwestern Medical Group Patient Representatives Department at 312.695.1100, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363.

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