

Lipoedema

What is lipoedema?

Lipoedema is a chronic and progressive disorder of the adipose (fat) tissue. It is sometimes called painful fat syndrome. Lipoedema usually presents in the lower half of the body but can also be found in the upper arms and other areas of the body.

What causes lipoedema?

Lipoedema is almost certainly a genetic inherited condition because there is often more than one family member affected. It mainly affects women, with very rare reports of men with similar signs and symptoms. Lipoedema tends to start at puberty or at times of hormonal change, such as pregnancy or the menopause, which suggests hormones may also have an influence.

Although the accumulation of fat tends to be worse in people who are obese, the condition is not caused by obesity and can affect people who are a normal weight.

What are the symptoms?

- Disproportionately larger/fatter legs and hips compared to the upper body.
- Adipose tissue / fatty deposits, that look like cellulite and feel soft on the hips, buttocks and legs.
- Upper arms may also be disproportionately fatter.
- Swelling is symmetrical (both sides of the body are affected equally).
- Skin of affected areas may be pale and cold.
- Hands and feet are not affected but there is often a fatty cuff at the ankle or wrist.
- Tenderness/pain and easy or spontaneous bruising to affected areas.
- Increased swelling in hot weather.

The degree of enlargement caused by lipoedema differs between individuals with the condition and it can gradually worsen over time.

How is it treated?

Lipoedema is a long-term condition and there is currently no cure. However, the symptoms can be managed and further complications reduced with treatment and ongoing self-management. The aim of treatment is to minimise discomfort, support the tissues and prevent swelling and further secondary complications such as lymphoedema or varicose veins.

Treatment may include:

- skincare
- compression hosiery
- exercise
- learning how to manage it yourself.

What doesn't work?

Lipoedema does not respond to:

- raising your legs
- diuretics (tablets to get rid of excess fluid)
- dieting (however maintaining a healthy weight is important and being overweight exacerbates lipoedema symptoms).

Further information

Further information and support is available from:

Lipoedema UK

www.lipoedema.co.uk

Talk Lipoedema

www.talklipoedema.org

Contact us

Lymphoedema Clinic

Mon – Fri 8.00-16.00

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