

Anticoagulation & DVT service

What is fluid retention?

Fluid retention is when blood vessels leak fluid into the surrounding tissues. This usually affects the lower leg, ankle and the foot.

As we get older the valves in our veins do not work quite as well and therefore blood returning to the heart becomes a bit sluggish. Along with the valves being less competent and being a little less active, fluid will gravitate to the lowest point namely the lower leg, ankles, and feet.

What causes fluid retention?

- Fluid retention is caused by various factors:
- Standing or sitting in the same position for too long
- Eating foods that have a high salt content
- Being overweight
- Being pregnant
- Medications: blood pressure medication, contraceptive pill, anti-depressants, or steroids
- Injury, such as a strain or sprain
- Insect bites or stings
- Problems with the kidneys, liver, or heart
- A blood clot – DVT (deep vein thrombosis)
- Infection

Symptoms of fluid retention

- Swollen or puffy ankles, feet, and lower leg
- Shiny, stretched or red skin over the swollen area
- With fluid retention the swelling is usually in both legs and most of the time the swelling reduces overnight
- If you press into the swollen area it will leave a dent where your finger has been, this indicates that there is fluid in the tissues of the leg, ankle, or foot

How to reduce the swelling

- When sitting ensure you sit with your feet up
- Lie down and use pillows to raise the swollen limb when you can
- Gentle exercise helps to improve the blood flow within the legs
- Wear wide comfortable shoes
- Wash, dry and moisturise your legs, ankles, and feet to avoid infections
- Avoid foods with a high salt content

Don't

- Stand or sit for long periods of time
- Do not wear clothes, socks or shoes that are too tight – if you are prone to swollen ankles try wearing relaxed top socks

If simple actions do not help with the symptoms after a few days or the symptoms get worse see your GP.

Seek medical attention if:

- the swelling is confined to one leg only and there is no obvious cause or injury
- you have sudden onset of pain
- the area is red and hot to touch
- you develop a temperature and become shivery

Always contact your GP if you have any of the above symptoms and are also diabetic.

Remain well hydrated and remain as active as possible to reduce your risks of developing a deep vein thrombosis (DVT).

Clinical research

West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust is actively involved in clinical research. Your doctor, clinical team or the research and development department may contact you regarding specific clinical research studies that you might be interested in participating in. If you do not wish to be contacted for these purposes, please email info.gov@wsh.nsh.uk. This will in no way affect the care or treatment you receive.

Accessibility

If you require this leaflet in a different format, please contact the patient advice and liaison service on 01284 712555 or email PALS@wsh.nhs.uk

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