Dear Alice,

About a week ago my feet became swollen. I thought this condition would go away but it hasn't. It makes wearing shoes uncomfortable and my feet are now hurting. I've tried soaking them to no avail. Ice packs don't help either.

Signed,
Big Foot

Answer

Dear Big Foot,

Taking the proper next steps may help lighten your step. Swelling, a.k.a. edema, is caused by a buildup of fluids, and when this happens in the legs, ankles, and/or feet, it's called peripheral edema. Give some of the following tips a try, and consider seeing a health care provider to find the true cause and appropriate treatment, especially for prolonged swelling.

While swollen feet (ankles, or legs) may have a wide variety of causes, they may be related to one or more of the following:

- Sitting or standing in one position too long, which includes sitting in your seat too long during air travel
- Injury or trauma
- Menstruation (for some women)
- Overweight
- Older age
- Consuming too much salt
- Pregnancy

Swollen legs may also be caused by certain medications, including certain diabetes medications, high-estrogen birth control pills, calcium channel blockers, certain antidepressants, and steroids. Other times, swelling of the legs may be an indication of more serious underlying conditions, including kidney, heart, or liver failure. If left untreated and swelling doesn't go away, edema may cause complications, including increasingly painful swelling, difficulty walking, stiffness, increased risk of infection, stretched skin, scarring within the tissue, and decreased blood circulation.
A step in the right direction to figure out the cause of your swelling and the appropriate treatment would be to speak with a health care provider. In some cases, swollen legs can be a sign of an underlying condition. Be prepared to discuss your symptoms and when they started, if you've been on any medications or have any medical conditions, and what you have been doing to treat it.

In the meantime, some strides to help relieve the swelling include:

- **Apply some pressure.** Put on support stockings, or compression stockings, in the morning on the swollen body part to reduce fluid buildup and improve circulation throughout the day.
- **Massage the swelling.** Try stroking the swollen body part towards your heart firmly, but without causing pain, to help movement of excess fluid.
- **Keep on moving.** Try stretching and taking a walk to avoid sitting or standing in one place for too long. Regular exercise, especially leg exercises, may help increase circulation, removing some of the fluid from your feet.
- **Elevate your swollen body part.** Try to take half hour breaks about three or four times in the day elevating your swollen feet above your heart level. If you can, sleeping with your swollen body part elevated may also help.
- **Stay cool.** Extreme temperatures of very hot or very cold may worsen swelling. Maybe lay off the hot soaks and ice packs.
- **Stay light.** Losing excess weight may put a damper on good circulation.
- **Easy with the salt.** Try consuming a low-salt eating plan.
- **Try loose fit.** Try wearing loose articles of clothing, like sandals. Also, consider finding a pair of proper fitting shoes that aren't too tight.

If swelling doesn't go away with these steps, you're recommended to walk towards a health care provider for medical attention. Take care of the swelling to make your Big Foot tiptoe into a distant memory!

Alice!

Category: [General Health](#)

Aches, Pains & Other Ailments [3]

**Related questions**

- [Bloated and sick around period](#)
- [Bloating or water retention?](#)
- [Salt substitutes](#)

**Resources**

- [Medical Services (Morningside)](#)
- [Medical Services (CUMC)](#)

Published date: Nov 15, 1995
Last reviewed on: Apr 21, 2015