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Treating Swollen Feet and Ankles

Self-massage techniques to reduce Peripheral Edema

I have had the problem of swollen feet and ankles for some time. Medical treatment for what is termed Peripheral Edema, in my case at least, was the taking of pills: various medications in addition to those already prescribed for high blood pressure. A particular one, Hydrochlorothiazide that was supposed to reduce fluid retained in the body had me running to the toilet frequently to urinate; plus, it gave me headaches so it was discontinued in favour of a different drug which did nothing for the lower limb swelling either. Walking was also recommended, an activity I found to be most uncomfortable due to advanced Osteo Arthritis, and it didn't fix the "rising dough" texture of my feet and ankles. I had almost given up on finding a cure when my wife discovered an article on the Internet.

It was a report by Dr. Alina Reid, a Board-certified vascular specialist. She had been treating patients with swollen legs for nineteen years, as well as self-medicating because she suffered from the same condition. While attending a conference in Phoenix she came across Dr. Raymond Costa, a 71 year old Physical Therapist. When she remarked that his ankles appeared slim, despite having been standing for a number of hours, she asked how it was that his legs weren't swollen. Before he answered he asked if he might see *her* legs. Embarrassing though it was, she raised her wide-leg trousers to reveal her swollen ankles. Alina admitted she'd had the condition for 15 months which prompted a warning from Dr. Costa that she had between 6 to 9 months to put the matter right or risk the condition being irreversible! Then he offered Alina thirty minutes of his time to give her a solution.

The problem, he explained, was not to do with her heart as she had imagined, but a malfunction in what he termed her "Second Heart" which was in the calf muscle. This particular pump was responsible for pumping blood against gravity from the feet back up to the heart. Like many other sufferers of Peripheral Edema, the one-way valves in her calf muscles which prevented blood from being drawn by gravity back down to her feet had sprung leaks. Consequently, the blood became trapped in her feet and ankles, hence the swelling. Pills wouldn't drain it, he maintained, and compression stockings simply held the fluid in place. Even some of the generic vibrating massagers couldn't penetrate deep enough to reach the motor nerves. There was, however, a procedure of hand massage that could re-start that "Second Heart" pump.

The following is a set of exercises I have been doing for a couple of weeks now, and this self-massage therapy conducted while sitting is having a definite positive effect. My feet and ankles are less swollen, and after a night's sleep they are pretty much back to normal by morning. That hadn't been the case for ages.

The warm-up is stroking the calf muscles from the ankles up to the knees. I use three fingers to cover the middle and outsides of the muscles. Applying oil is recommended, but I don't bother and it doesn't seem a problem. Suggested pressure is

light, although I tend to press quite firmly. The idea is to encourage the increase of blood circulation back up to the heart. I usually do five repetitions of the exercise before moving to the next one.

The kneading procedure involves gently squeezing and rolling the calf muscle tissue between the hands to loosen any knots. While massaging I count to five for each leg.

The next exercise employs the use of thumbs or knuckles, applying deeper pressure along the muscles from bottom to top. Actions should be concentrated on the meaty part of the muscles, avoiding the shin bone, and working the inner, outer and central parts of the calf. After this I work fingers or knuckles from side to side over the muscles, moving from the ankle to the knee.

While performing any of these exercises, should a tender spot be felt, often deeper in the muscle, pressure on the knot with a finger held for 60-90 seconds can help relieve the discomfort over time.

Finally, I repeat the warm-up procedure to wind down.

As a footnote a couple of months down the track I have increased the repetitions to 10 per exercise.

There are devices available that vibrate and massage, many like the generic ones already mentioned, however, do little to combat Peripheral Edema because they don't penetrate deeply enough, nor do they stimulate the deep motor nerves. Some others do employ EMS technology which send electrical impulses directly to the motor nerves; **but be warned:** we have researched one or two of these and they are not recommended for anyone like myself who has a pacemaker implanted. Unfortunately they don't always make this clear in their advertisements. So, don't buy until you have checked them out yourself.

In closing I leave you with Dr. Alina's report that, since suggesting this method of treating Peripheral Edema to her patients, her follow-up appointments dropped 71% in six months. Surely that has to speak for itself...?

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