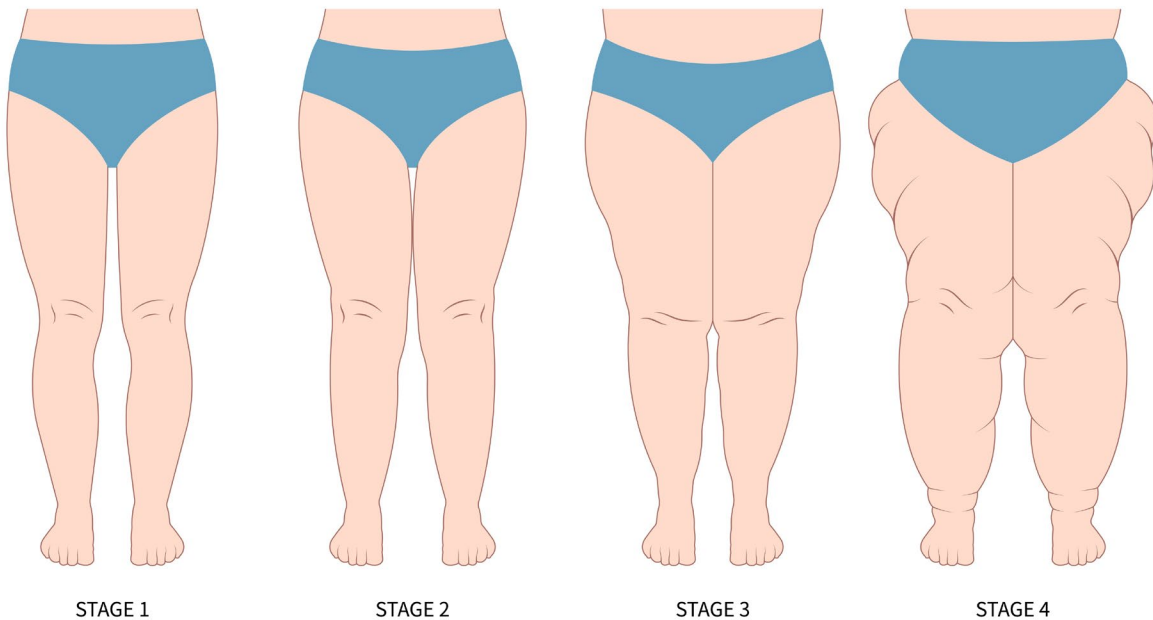


# Lipedema

## What is lipedema?

- **Lipedema** is a long-term condition that causes an unusual fat buildup in your body. This usually occurs on both sides of your lower body - usually in your legs, butt, thighs, or calves - but it can also be in your arms. Unlike ordinary body fat, lipedema doesn't improve with diet and exercise. It can cause pain and make daily activities difficult.
- People sometimes confuse lipedema with lymphedema or with being overweight, but these are different conditions. **Lymphedema** is swelling caused by fluid buildup in the body. However, lipedema can lead to lymphedema.
- Although there isn't a cure for lipedema, treatments can help you feel better.

LIPEDEMA STAGES



## **What are the different types of lipedema?**

You may have more than one type of lipedema at a time, depending on where you have symptoms. Types of lipedema include:

- **Type I:** Fat is between your belly button and your hips.
- **Type II:** Fat is between your pelvis and knees.
- **Type III:** Fat is between your pelvis and ankles.
- **Type IV:** Fat is between your shoulders and wrists.
- **Type V:** Fat is between your knees and ankles.

## **What are the symptoms of lipedema?**

Lipedema symptoms include:

- Fat buildup in your butt, thighs, calves, and sometimes upper arms on both sides of your body.
- Bumps inside the fat that feel like there's something under your skin.
- Pain that can range from mild to severe, and from constant pain to pain only with pressure.
- A heavy feeling in your legs.
- Swelling.
- Skin that bruises easily.
- Fatigue (feeling more tired than usual).

Lipedema slowly (or quickly for some) gets worse over time for some people.

Other people with lipedema have mild symptoms that don't get worse.

Early diagnosis and treatment may help you avoid complications. A provider can refer you for counseling, physical therapy, or occupational therapy to help with managing your pain.

## **What causes lipedema?**

- The exact cause of lipedema is unknown. The condition tends to run in families and occurs almost exclusively in women and people assigned female at birth.
- Lipedema may have a connection to hormones, because it usually starts or gets worse during puberty, pregnancy, menopause, and when you're taking birth control pills.

## **What are the risk factors for lipedema?**

You're more likely to get lipedema if:

- You're female or assigned female at birth.
- You have a family history of lipedema.
- You have a body mass index (BMI) higher than 35.

## **How can I lower my risk of lipedema?**

Not knowing the exact causes of lipedema makes it hard to avoid. But if you have the risk factors of having lipedema in your family and being female or assigned female at birth, you can try to stay at a weight that's healthy for you. Talk with your provider about ways to meet your weight goals.

## **What are the health risks for people with lipedema?**

Lipedema can lead to:

- Difficulty with walking.
- Anxiety and depression.
- Secondary lymphedema or lipo-lymphedema (which is a blockage in your lymphatic pathway that allows a fluid called **lymph** to build up).
- Venous (vein) disease.
- Flat feet.
- Joint issues.

- Knock knees (where your knees touch each other when your feet are apart).

## **How is lipedema diagnosed?**

A healthcare provider can test you for lipedema by doing a physical exam and collecting your medical history. Some signs of lipedema include if your fat feels painful (unlike ordinary body fat, which doesn't hurt) and if there is a clear size difference between your legs and feet (since lipedema doesn't affect the feet). Your provider may also do blood tests and imaging (like MRIs, CTs, or x-rays) to rule out other issues or find other conditions you may have with lipedema.

## **What are the stages of lipedema?**

Lipedema slowly gets worse with time in many people. Lipedema stages include:

- **Stage 1:** Your skin looks normal, but you can feel something like pebbles under your skin. You can have pain and bruising at this stage.
- **Stage 2:** Your skin surface is uneven and may have dimpling that looks like quilted stitching, a walnut shell, or cottage cheese.
- **Stage 3:** Your legs can look like inflated rectangular balloons and you have large folds of skin and fat. Fat on your legs may stick out, making it hard to walk.
- **Stage 4:** You have lipedema and lymphedema at the same time.

## **How is lipedema treated?**

Researchers haven't found a cure, but lipedema treatments can help you feel better by reducing pain and inflammation (redness and swelling). You can start with simple, non-invasive treatments (treatments other than surgery) for lipedema and switch to more complex treatments if needed.

## Simple treatments

Lipedema treatment may include:

- Exercise. Swimming, biking, and walking help improve movement and reduce swelling. Exercising in a pool can reduce stress on your joints, too.
- An anti-inflammatory diet.
- A heart-healthy diet. This may help prevent your lipedema from getting worse, especially if you learn about your condition early on. However, dieting usually doesn't get rid of lipedema like it does with other fat.
- Compression stockings.
- Skin moisturizer.
- Medications or supplements (like amphetamines, phentermine, metformin, resveratrol, diosmin, and selenium) can help with inflammation, swelling, and other issues.

## Non-invasive treatments

Your provider may suggest non-invasive treatments for lipedema, like:

- Lymphatic drainage massage.
- Complex decongestive therapy (a massage with a compression wrap afterward).
- A pneumatic compression device (which you wear on your legs).

## Invasive (surgical) treatments

- **Liposuction** can remove fat and help with pain and movement. Providers recommend water jet-assisted liposuction because it's less likely than standard liposuction to damage your lymph vessels.
- If you have lipedema and a BMI higher than 35, your provider may recommend **bariatric (weight loss) surgery**.
- Some possible complications (medical issues) from liposuction or bariatric surgery may include swelling, bleeding, infection, or blood clots.

- It can take 4-6 weeks to recover from liposuction. After bariatric surgery, you'll need several weeks to recover as well. You may need to avoid high-intensity activities for 6 weeks after either procedure.

### **If I have lipedema, how can I take care of myself?**

Follow your provider's instructions for the treatments they prescribe for you. If you're not sure when to take medication or how long to wear compression stockings, just ask. Keeping your regular appointments with your provider will help them see the progress you're making from one visit to the next.

### **When should I see my healthcare provider?**

Your provider may want to see you monthly or every few months to monitor your treatment. Contact them if you're having issues with any of your treatments or if they don't seem to be working in the time frame you discussed. Your provider can suggest a different treatment that may help.

### **When should I go to the emergency room (ER)?**

Get immediate medical help if you have:

- Red, painful, swollen legs.
- Flu-like symptoms (fever, chills, coughing, sneezing, body aches, etc.).

This could be signs of an infection (called **cellulitis**).

### **What questions should I ask my doctor?**

Questions you may want to ask your provider could include:

- What type and stage is my lipedema?
- What's the best treatment for me?
- How much has this treatment helped others with lipedema?
- How often do I need follow-up appointments?

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