

# Understanding Lipoedema

The painful fat disease  
that impacts 1 in 11 Aussie women



## What is lipoedema?

- Lipoedema (or lipedema) is a painful fat disorder that causes accumulated fat in the subcutaneous tissue of the skin and a cellulite appearance.
- It disproportionately affects the lower limbs and sometimes the upper arms.
- It is a chronically progressive disease almost exclusive to women and it tends to run in families.
- It is often accompanied by easy bruising and sometimes causes severe pain.
- Lipoedema currently impacts 11% of all women; many have no idea they have it.
- Unlike normal fat, lipoedema fat does not respond to diet.
- There is currently no cure, although treatments can help stop it progressing.

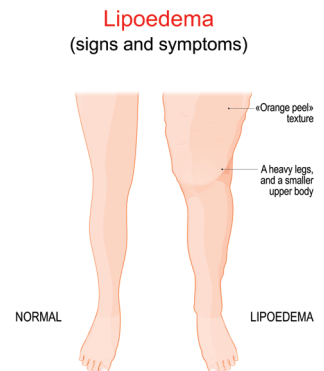
## Why does vein disease occur with lipoedema?

Not everyone with lipoedema will have underlying vein disease, but it is concurrent for many. For women considering liposuction surgery for lipoedema, surgeons now request a Doppler ultrasound to assess vein function first.

Signs of concurrent vein issues with lipoedema include:

- Dark veins
- Achy, heavy legs
- Burning legs
- Restless legs
- Itchy veins
- Night cramps

If you do notice these symptoms call us today on:  
**1300VEINCARE**



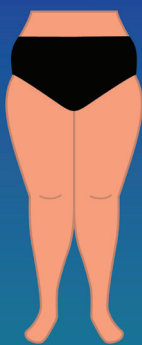
## What are the symptoms of lipoedema?

- Smaller waist (e.g size 8-10 on top and 16-18 on the bottom)
- Both legs usually affected
- Cellulite appearance of skin
- High flexibility or being double jointed a common hallmark
- Fat is soft and wobbly
- Legs may feel cool to the touch
- Frequently (but not always) underlying vein disease (spider veins or varicose veins).
- In more severe stages women will have severe joint pain or even be confined to a wheelchair.
- Worsens during puberty, pregnancy and menopause
- More than 85% of women with lipoedema have depression or anxiety.
- Many women are completely unaware they have Lipoedema.

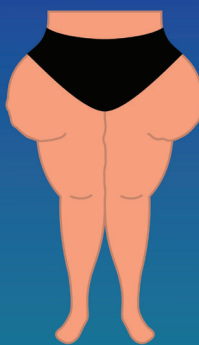
## Lipedema Classification by Stage



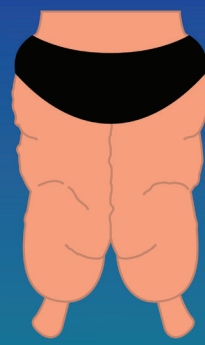
normal



stage 1



stage 2



stage 3

## What are the stages of lipoedema?

**Stage 1** - Normal skin surface but an enlarged fatty layer in the skin, some pain and easy bruising. A doctor may feel nodules under the skin (think rice grains or pea).

**Stage 2** - Uneven skin with indentation in the larger collections of fat in the skin layer

**Stage 3** - Bulky fatty rolls of skin and fat especially around the thighs and knees although it can also affect the upper arms and lower calf.

Some doctors refer to a **Stage 4** lipoedema, which is where lymphotoedema is also involved.

Please note, although this is a progressive disease not all **Stage 1** lipoedema will progress to **Stage 3** and different women progress at different rates.

Some women can stay **Stage 1** for their whole lives while others will notice rapid escalation during times of hormonal change

# What's the difference?

Lipoedema v lipo-lymphoedema v lymphoedema v obesity v vein disease

|                            | Lipedema   | Lipolymphedema   | Lymphedema   | Obesity   | Venous insufficiency/<br>venous stasis  |
|----------------------------|--|--|--|---|---|
| <b>Symptoms</b>            | Fat deposits and swelling in legs and arms not hands or feet initially. Hands and feet may be affected as disease progresses. More of an hourglass body shape. Hormonal onset. | Fat deposits and swelling widespread in legs, arms torso. Hormonally influenced. | Fat deposits and swelling in one limb including hands and feet. Often occurs after surgery that impacts the lymphatic system, or at birth. | Fat deposits are widespread. Notable central obesity shape or apple shape. Occurs at any age. | Swelling near ankles, discolouration of lower legs, minimal swelling. Often triggered by obesity, diabetes, pregnancy, high blood pressure. |
| <b>Male/Female</b>         | F  | F  | F/M  | F/M   | F/M   |
| <b>Dietary Impact</b>      | Kilojoule restriction ineffective  | Kilojoule restriction ineffective  | Kilojoule restriction ineffective  | Diet and exercise often effective   | Related to diabetes/lifestyle weight gain   |
| <b>Edema*</b>              | Non-pitting edema  | Much edema, some pitting, some fibrosis  | Pitting edema  | No edema  | With or in early stages without edema   |
| <b>Stemmer's Sign*</b>     | Negative   | Positive   | Positive   | Negative  | Can be Negative or Positive   |
| <b>Populatio Incidence</b> | 11%  | Low  | Low  | 1 in three adults   | 1 in three adults   |
| <b>Cellulitis</b>          | No history   | Likely history   | Possible history   | 1 in three adults   | Itching and discolouration mistaken for cellulitis  |
| <b>Family History</b>      | Likely   | Likely   | Not likely   | Likely  | Very likely   |

\*Test for Stemmer's sign involves pinching skinfold at base of second toe. If skin lifts Stemmer's sign is negative. If it doesn't lift it is positive.

\* Edema is caused by fluid build up. Pitting edema occurs when you press skin and an indentation appears, while non-pitting edema feels firm and there is no indentation.



## What helps with lipoedema?

Although there is no cure for lipoedema you can help it progressing to a more advanced stage with:

- An anti-inflammatory diet (reduced alcohol, low carbs and low/no sugar)
- Running (rather than swimming) in the pool (the water acts as compression)
- Wearing compression wear daily under clothes
- Regular manual lymphatic drainage
- Pneumatic compression pump at home
- Treating underlying vein conditions
- In severe cases, liposuction is an option, but make sure you ask about your surgeon's experience.
- Plastic or reconstructive surgery/or vascular surgery credentials are highly regarded. Lipoedema liposuction (tumescent liposuction) requires extra training and expertise.

## Why haven't I heard about lipoedema?

- Many women did not know about lipoedema until recently - it was only recognised as a disease by the World Health Organisation in 2018.
- Many GPs in Australia also do not know about the condition, and many lipoedema patients say they are told by their GP simply to "lose weight".
- The condition is frequently misdiagnosed as obesity or lymphoedema.
- There is still very little awareness in both the medical and general community.
- Over time, mobility and quality of life can be reduced.

## How can AVC help with my lipoedema?

If you suspect you have underlying vein disease please see us for a Doppler ultrasound. If you have been diagnosed with lipoedema and are considering lipoedema surgery with a plastic surgeon call us about a Doppler ultrasound which is now required by most plastic surgeons to assess any underlying vein damage.

AVC also stocks Sigvaris compression wear which we can measure you for.

AVC has lipoedema vein clinics in Gregory Hills Sydney, Wollongong and Orange.



Call us today on  
**1300VEINCARE**



Want to find out about the latest non-surgical and surgical treatments for lipoedema? Go to [www.theartofveincare.com.au/lipoedema](http://www.theartofveincare.com.au/lipoedema)