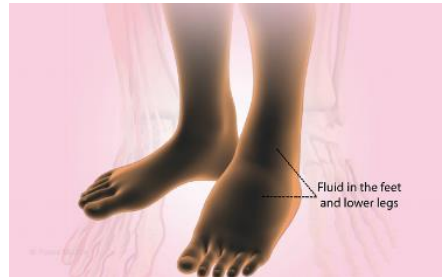


DROPSY (EDEMA).

This word signifies an accumulation of watery liquid in some of the natural cavities of the body, or a diffusion of this fluid through the loose tissue, or both. It is an important symptom of other diseases, for **water can never collect unless some of the tissues are diseased.**

There are certain cavities in the body which do not open externally, neither do they communicate with other cavities, nor with each other by any opening. These cavities are each lined with smooth and delicate membranes, called serous membranes, whose office it is to secrete a smooth serous or watery fluid for the purpose of keeping the organs contained within the cavity well lubricated.

In health, there is a constant secretion of this fluid, yet it does not accumulate, for it is absorbed as fast as it is poured into these cavities. There may be two conditions in which this water may be caused to accumulate. The first, which is



called active or acute dropsy, is caused by an inflamed condition of the serous membrane. This causes an excessive amount of the fluid to be poured out. The second is called chronic or passive dropsy, and is occasioned by deficient absorption caused by an inflamed, congested, torpid, or otherwise diseased condition of some of the vital organs.

Such being the case, it is evident that anything which can induce irritation, congestion, or a slight degree of inflammation of the serous membranes, such as cold, the sudden repelling (striking in) of skin diseases, the changing of the seat (metastasis) of gout or rheumatism (this is caused by taking drugs), etc., will occasion acute or active dropsy. Secondly, whatever weakens the tissues or impoverishes the blood, as insufficient food, loss of blood, or exhausting disease. Thirdly, anything which obstructs the circulation and causes a retention or sluggish movement of blood in the veins, as the closing of the veins by inflammation, or the pressure of swollen or inflamed organs. The pressure caused by tumors, as well as organic disease of any of the vital organs, will frequently cause chronic dropsy.

If dropsy occurs within the skull, it is called hydrocephalus, or dropsy of the brain. If it occurs within the chest, or thorax, it is called hydrothorax, or dropsy of the

chest. If within the pericardium— the membrane that surrounds the heart— it is called hydropericardium, or dropsy of the heart. If it occurs within the peritoneum — the membrane which lines the abdominal cavity— it is called ascites. If the water is collected within the coats of the testicle, it is called hydrocele. If the water is generally diffused throughout the loose tissues of the entire body, it is called anasarca, or general dropsy. If the dropsy is confined to the feet, or to any other small locality, it is called oedema.

Acute dropsy, or that form which is produced by active inflammation of the serous membranes, will generally end favorably soon after the inflammation of the membranes subsides, but that which supervenes on other diseases is rarely curable.

General Treatment.— In treating dropsy it is important to know its cause. In the acute form, the treatment must be such as to allay the inflammation. This will be spoken of in connection with local inflammations. In treating chronic dropsy, we should seek to improve the general health of the patient by a careful compliance with all of the laws of health (read care fully Part I.). The accumulated water may be removed by occasional sweats (see **Hot-air-bath** Part III.), taken perhaps twice

a week, also the **wet-sheet-pack** may be taken once a week and the **hot-air** or **vapor-bath** once. Warm clothing should be worn at all times. In addition to the above, the patient should take constitutional treatment, which see. In many cases, the water accumulates so as almost to prevent breathing. In such case, it is necessary to draw the water off by tapping.