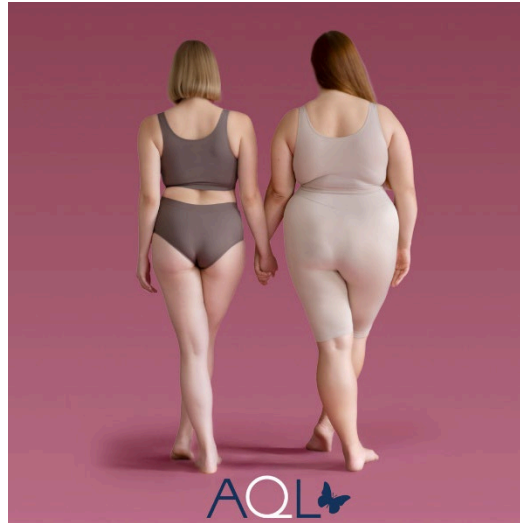


## Lipedema and Lipo-lymphedema

Understand the condition. Find support through the LAQ. Make your voice heard.



### What is lipedema?

**Lipedema is a progressive chronic disease** that affects almost exclusively women. It is characterized by an **abnormal and painful accumulation of adipose tissue**, mainly in the legs and sometimes the arms, with a **marked resistance to weight loss**. Lipedema is often mistaken for obesity or lymphedema, which significantly delays diagnosis and appropriate care.

**Lipedema is not caused by a sedentary lifestyle or poor diet. It is a distinct medical condition.**

### Signs of lipedema

**Lipedema** is a chronic disease that typically begins at puberty, during pregnancy, or at menopause. It progresses slowly over time and is often misdiagnosed or confused with other conditions such as obesity or lymphedema.

Common signs include:

- **Symmetrical accumulation of painful fat** in the legs (and sometimes arms)
- **Typical sparing of hands and feet**
- **Sensation of heaviness, tightness, or tenderness to touch**
- **Tendency to develop spontaneous bruising**
- **Resistance to dieting and exercise**
- Sometimes, **mobility loss** or functional discomfort
- **Body image disturbances** that may affect quality of life
- In some cases, **secondary involvement of the lymphatic system leading to lipo-lymphedema**

A distinct physical sign is the **sharp demarcation between the ankle and the calf**, often described as a “column-like leg” or “boot-shaped leg.”

### What is lipo-lymphedema?

When **lipedema goes untreated for several years**, it can result in damage to the lymphatic system. This condition is then referred to as **lipo-lymphedema** – a secondary form of lymphedema that develops in addition to the existing lipedema. A diagnosis of lipo-lymphedema involves the **accumulation of lymphatic fluid in the tissues**, causing **chronic swelling** that responds to lymphedema treatments.

### Differences between lipedema, lymphedema, and lipo-lymphedema

While all three conditions cause chronic swelling, they are **distinct diseases**:

- **Lipedema** is a chronic condition marked by the abnormal and painful buildup of fat, primarily in the legs (and sometimes the arms), with symmetrical distribution, **sparing of hands and feet**, and a strong tendency to bruise. It is not a lymphatic disorder in its early stages.
- **Lymphedema**, on the other hand, is caused by **lymphatic system failure**, leading to lymph fluid accumulation in tissues. The swelling is often **asymmetrical**, always involves the **extremities**, and can result in **long-term skin changes**.
- **Lipo-lymphedema** refers to untreated lipedema that has evolved into **secondary lymphedema**. It presents signs of both conditions, with more severe swelling and a higher risk of complications such as cellulitis.

### How is a diagnosis made?

Lipedema and lipo-lymphedema remain **poorly understood** by many healthcare providers. Diagnosis is based on a thorough **clinical evaluation**, often conducted by a family physician, phlebologist, dermatologist, or a professional with expertise in chronic edema.

The LAQ recommends consulting a **certified lymphedema/chronic edema therapist**, who can:

- Recognize the signs of the disease
- Document physical findings
- Refer you to a physician
- Begin treatment without delay

[Find a certified therapist near you](#)

[Contact the LAQ's Therapeutic Support Program](#)

### Conservative treatment: A key first step

There is currently **no cure** for lipedema. Surgery (e.g., specialized liposuction), which is not yet available in Canada, is not a first-line treatment, and often requires repeat procedures over a lifetime.

Before any surgical approach, international guidelines are clear:

A well-structured conservative treatment plan is essential to improve quality of life and optimize surgical outcomes.

This treatment includes:

- **Complete decongestive therapy (CDT)** – including manual lymphatic drainage, skin care, appropriate exercise, and compression
- **Wearing custom compression garments**
- **Ongoing professional support** tailored to your goals

Following surgery, compression and CDT remain essential during recovery.

*Note: The RAMQ program for lymphedema is only accessible to individuals with lipedema if they have a confirmed medical diagnosis of lipo-lymphedema.*

[Explore LAQ resources on CDT and compression](#)

[Learn more about the RAMQ program for lipo-lymphedema](#)

## **The Role of the LAQ**

For more than 26 years, the LAQ has been Québec's go-to organization for support and advocacy for individuals living with chronic edema and lymphedema. Through our network of certified therapists, educational resources, and awareness campaigns, we are proud to extend our mission to include those affected by lipedema and lipo-lymphedema.

**We're here to help you understand the disease, begin treatment, and break the cycle of isolation.**

[Join the LAQ community](#)

## **Our Commitment to Lipedema Recognition**

The LAQ is committed to:

- **Advocating for official recognition of lipedema** as a disease requiring adapted and reimbursed care
- **Promoting evidence-based standards of treatment**
- **Equipping healthcare professionals** with the knowledge to act appropriately
- **Supporting those affected** – at any stage of the disease

Together, we are advancing the cause of lipedema and lipo-lymphedema in Québec.

[Support our work with a donation](#)

[Learn more about our mission and advocacy](#)

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