

- ~~Medical~~ observation
by unknown Physician

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Dropsy is the term indicating an accumulation of watery fluid in one or more of the ^(see*) serous cavities. It is now a term for all intents

attached in Western medicine. It connotes the general condition of swelling associated ^{most often} with cardiac insufficiency. It is seen in heart disease, pregnancy, vitamin deficiency and poisoning (and occurs as described anon.)

A kind of dropsy occurs in India due to ingestion of poisonous seeds of the poppy.

Argemone mexicana which sometimes grows as a weed in mustard fields or wheat fields. The seed is sometimes deliberately or accidentally present as an adulterant in mustard oil. Where mustard oil is used in cooking, dropsy which occurs as the result of the ingestion of this contaminant occurs in the appearance of an epidemic and appear to have some relation to freshness of the oil. This dropsy appeared in South Africa in relation to ingestion of flour made from badly sifted wheat.

The gross physiologic changes consist of effusion of fluids into the peritoneal (abdominal)

"It seems desirable to take into account the possibility that toxic substances contained in rice and mustard oil may be concerned in the cause even though the chief factor is believed to be argemone oil poisoning."

J. W. Megaw (in The British
Encyclopaedia of Medical
Practice, London, 1950)

* serous (delicate, smooth, & secretory or permeable shiny membrane linings) cavities or a diffusion of such fluid through the interstitial tissue of the body or its organs or a combination of both.
Edema is diffusion of fluid into tissues of the body and anasarca is generalized subcutaneous edema.

extravasator tissues associated with the increased small blood vessel permeability resulting from the toxin. The later or advanced condition consists of accumulation of fluid in abdominal, lung and pericardial (heart) cavities and is due to the heart failure resulting from the primary fluid imbalances. There is acute enlargement of small blood vessels manifesting as redness - blood vessels being visible - in the eyes; and warmth and redness of the skin. In some cases, little pedestalled tumors of the skin, consisting of new abnormal small blood vessels, form. These may bleed readily. Haemorrhage may occur from mucous membranes (inside mouth, nose, intestines conjunctivae and urethra)

Symptoms and signs might be mild tending to have them overlooked if they are not associated with an epidemic. Usually, it is insidious - usually with a few days history of loss of appetite, nausea and diarrhoea followed by the appearance of oedema (swelling) swelling appears rapidly. It is soft and easily pitted with the finger; and mostly

confined to the legs. It becomes worse if the individual walks about. (My own experience, two years ago was in Calcutta my legs became swollen, I was extremely fatigued; at that time I had an attack of kidney inflammation) The individual experiences shortness of breath particularly on exertion. The blood pressure is low, particularly the lower figure, and the pulse is ~~not~~ rapid (and thready in the severe condition.) The heart is enlarged in severe cases. Certain kind of murmurs are there. The E.G.G. may show heart muscle damage. Acute heart failure may develop. Tachycardia (showing itself grossly as palpitations) may develop. Acute heart failure shows itself with atrial fibrillation and enlarged, tender liver.

Dilation of small blood vessels in the skin gives an irregular bluish mottled appearance in most cases. Little subcutaneous haemorrhages are seen in some cases. These may develop into small tumours as or "scurfoids", up to $\frac{1}{2}$ in. across. Super-sensitivity of the

sense of touch, tingling of the skin and tenderness of the calf muscles are sometimes seen. The knee-jerk reflex may be absent. There may be mild fever. Nausea is the rule and often vomiting. Watery diarrhea is common. (These latter signs and symptoms are all similar to the effects ^{seen in} of vitamin B deficiency.)

Blaucoma (opacification of the lenses) associated with eye pain, and headache (both variably), dimness of vision and contracted visual fields.

Diagnosis is difficult if not in association of other cases. The diet must be carefully screened for contaminants.

This kind of 'dropy' does not respond to Vit B₁ treatment. Salt intake should be limited. ~~Conv~~ Convalescence is slow.

Shortness of breath, palpitations, and to a slightly lesser extent, the swelling of the legs subside upon bed rest and are worsened on exertion.

Other

Other causes of swelling of legs are:

- i) early stage heart failure: congestion in chest, marked shortness of breath and cough are dominantly present.
- b) later stages of severe, acute or chronic liver illness. The presence of jaundice, abdominal enlargement, liver tenderness and swelling, dark urine, foul bulky yellow stools, red tongue etc. etc. would be unmistakably other.
- c) Chronic malarial poisoning with enlarged liver and spleen: Also a history of jaundice resultant from or related to malarial attacks would be present inescapably.
- d) Abdominal tumors, enlarged liver, spleen, pancreas or abdominal lymph glands.
 *Enlarged pancreas especially in the presence of diabetes, should not be dispelled. This is rare however.
- e) Long standing, long walking, first rising on convalescence - these are common senile and not really abnormal.

Pancreatic tumors

- Abdominal pain - frequently related to meals and sometimes radiating to the back or to the shoulders. It is dull, persisting and sometimes relieved by bending forward.
- Weight loss
- diarrhea, black stool
- feelings of vague ill health in some.
depression anxiety.
- unstable diabetes
- multiple superficial venous thromboses

Laboratory

- elevated ESR
- anemia
- stool +ve for occult blood
- +ve glucose tolerance test.

Rd B