

How to Assess Bilateral Pitting Edema

Edema has three grades of severity, as shown in the table below.

Grade	Definition
Absent or 0	No bilateral pitting edema
Grade +	Mild (in both feet or ankles)
Grade ++	Moderate (in both feet plus lower legs, hands, or lower arms)
Grade +++	Severe (generalized, including both feet, legs, arms, and face)



Photo: Nicky Dent

Grade +

Mild (in both feet or both ankles)



Photo: Nicky Dent

Grade ++

Moderate (in both feet plus both lower legs, both hands, or both lower arms or both ankles)



Photo: Photographer unknown

Grade +++

Severe (generalized, in both feet, both legs, both arms, and face)

To assess for bilateral pitting edema:

- Press with your thumbs on both feet for 3 full seconds and then remove your thumbs.
- If the skin stays depressed on both feet, the person has bilateral pitting edema Grade + (mild).
- Do the same test on the lower legs, hands, and lower arms. If the skin stays depressed in these areas, look for swelling in the face, especially around the eyes. If there is no swelling in the face, then the person has Grade ++ (moderate) bilateral pitting edema. If swelling appears in the face, the person has Grade +++ (severe) bilateral pitting edema.



Photo: NuLife Project, Uganda, URC



Click here to watch a video on [how to assess edema](#).