

What Is Peripheral Artery Disease?

eripheral artery disease (PAD) is a condition that affects millions of people. PAD occurs when there is a buildup of plaque, or fatty deposits, inside your arteries that carry blood to your legs and feet. Many people have not heard of this condition. PAD often goes unnoticed because people assume their leg pain is due to soreness or arthritis. However, if your legs are healthy, you shouldn't have chronic leg pain.

Here are some factors that increase your risk for PAD:

- Increasing age
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Smoking
- High blood cholesterol

What Are the Symptoms of PAD?

The most common symptom is cramping in your leg muscles while you're walking. Pain that goes away when you stop and rest is called **intermittent claudication**. This is

caused by poor blood flow to muscles due to blocked arteries.

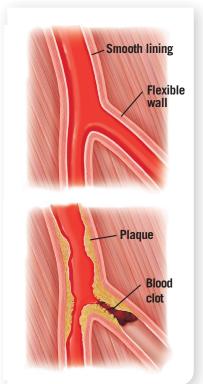
Other symptoms of PAD include:

- Burning or aching pain in your feet and toes while resting or sleeping
- Skin sores and wounds that won't heal
- Nails that don't grow
- Hair loss on legs
- Pale or discolored leg or foot
- Changing skin color on your legs

Both legs often have symptoms, although one leg may be worse.

The symptoms of PAD usually develop slowly over time. *If your symptoms develop quickly, or pain significantly increases over a short period of time, get help right away.* If you delay treatment, PAD can lead to serious health problems.

If you have a medical condition such as diabetes or high blood pressure and have symptoms of PAD, talk with your health care provider right away.



For more information, review these related flyers:

- Focus on the Ankle-Brachial Index
- Focus on Walking
- Lifesaving Tips About ...
 Foot Care and PAD;
 High Blood Pressure and PAD;
 Managing Diabetes and PAD;
 Smoking and Pad

HOW IS PAD TREATED?

There are many things you can do to keep PAD from getting worse. Here are some lifestyle changes you can make:



Eat a healthy diet. Your health care provider can refer you to a nutrition specialist or dietitian. They will help you find an eating plan that will not only help prevent PAD from getting worse, but can also reduce risk for heart attack and stroke.



Manage stress. Work-related stress, job strain, or other types of stress can make PAD worse. Stress may increase inflammation and cause higher blood glucose levels. Ask your health care team for healthy ways to cope with stress. Some health care offices have counselors or behavioralists on staff who can help.



Quit smoking. Smoking causes blood vessels to narrow and makes PAD worse.



Get regular exercise. Going for walks, even short distances, will help. Ask your health care provider about an exercise program that is right for you.



Medications, such as statins (lowers cholesterol), antiplatelets (helps prevent clotting), and ACE inhibitors (lowers blood pressure), can be used to treat PAD. Speak with your health care provider about the best treatment option.

How Is PAD Diagnosed?

The following tests help diagnose PAD:

- Physical exam. Your provider may find signs of PAD during a physical exam by feeling for weak or absent pulses over the arteries or looking for wounds that aren't healing properly. Make sure to mention any ongoing leg pain or sores that don't go away.
- Ankle-brachial index (ABI). This test compares the blood pressure in your ankle with the blood pressure in your arm.
- Ultrasound. This imaging technique can help clinicians find blocked or narrowed arteries.
- Angiography. During this test, dye is injected into the blood vessels to monitor blood flow through your arteries.

Surgical Treatment for PAD

Some patients have severe cases of PAD that impact their quality of life. They are unable to walk long distances or have difficulties performing daily tasks. There are many surgical procedures that can help. For example, angioplasty helps open blocked arteries, and an artery bypass can help redirect blood around a section of partially blocked or fully blocked arteries.

