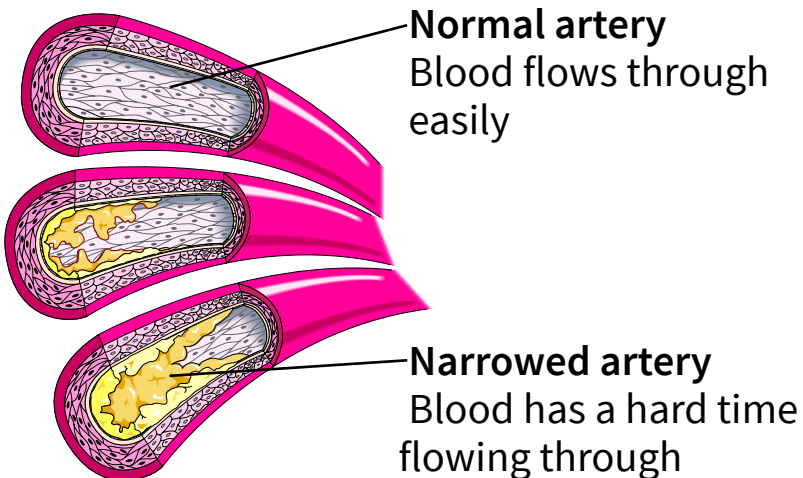# Peripheral Arterial Disease (PAD)

nova scotia
health

Peripheral Arterial Disease (PAD)

What is peripheral arterial disease (PAD)?

- PAD is when fatty materials called plaque build up in the arteries that supply blood to the brain, organs, and limbs (arms and legs).

- A build-up of plaque is called **atherosclerosis** ("ath-er-o-scleh-ro-sis").

- Over time, the plaque can narrow your arteries. This can lower or stop blood flow. This is most common in the arteries of the legs.

- Blocked blood flow can cause leg pain, gangrene (dead body tissue), or amputation (removal) of the foot or leg.

- If you have PAD, you have a higher chance of having a heart attack or stroke.

Normal artery
Blood flows through easily

Narrowed artery
Blood has a hard time flowing through

Other names for PAD include:

› Peripheral vascular disease
› Hardening of the arteries
› Leg atherosclerosis
› Blockages in the legs
› Claudication ("claw-di-kay-shun")
› Poor circulation

Symptoms of PAD may include:

› Pain, numbness, achiness, or heaviness in the leg, hip, or buttock (bum) muscles brought on by exercise, walking, or climbing stairs.
› Sores or wounds on the toes, feet, or legs that do not heal, or heal very slowly.
› Pain in the feet when resting.

How do I find out if I have PAD?

- Your doctor or nurse will ask you about your symptoms and do a physical exam.
- They may also send you for an **Ankle-Brachial Index (ABI)** test. This test compares the blood pressure in your ankles to the blood pressure in your arms. An ABI tells your doctor or nurse how well the blood is flowing in your legs.

What problems can PAD cause?

- PAD is a symptom of atherosclerosis in the body. Narrowed leg arteries may mean that you have narrowed arteries in other parts of your body.
- **Narrowed heart arteries can cause a heart attack.**
- **Narrowed arteries that supply blood to the brain can cause a stroke or a transient ischemic attack (mini-stroke).**
- **Narrowed leg arteries can limit your ability to work and affect your overall quality of life.**
- In severe (very bad) cases, PAD can lead to amputation of the foot or leg.

How is PAD treated?

Treatment for PAD includes lifestyle changes (to control your risk factors), medication, and possible surgery.

Controlling your risk factors is one way to treat PAD. Anything that damages the insides of your arteries can cause the arteries to become narrowed with plaque.

Lifestyle factors include:

Smoking

- **Smoking is the main cause of PAD because of the damage it causes to your arteries.**

- Quitting smoking will improve your health and may also lower your leg pain when you walk.

- If you want to stop smoking, talk with your doctor or nurse. They will tell you about services and supports and can help you access them.

- **Nova Scotia Health's Stop Smoking Program** is a free program for people who want to stop or cut back on smoking.
    - › https://mha.nshealth.ca/en/services/stop-smoking-program#info

Exercise

- Exercise is an easy way to help blood flow to your legs.

- Walking is often the best exercise for people with PAD.

- Walking every day for at least 30 minutes will help your body to improve blood flow. This may improve your leg pain and increase how far you can walk.

Control diabetes

If you have diabetes:

> › Follow your meal plan.
> › Check your blood sugar as advised by your doctor or nurse.
> › Take the medication(s) (pills or insulin) prescribed by your health care provider.
> › Check your feet every day for sores, cuts, or calluses (area of thick skin caused by repeated irritation).

Control your blood pressure

- Your blood pressure should be checked regularly.
- Take any medication(s) prescribed by your health care provider. If you stop taking your medication(s) or only take it sometimes, your blood pressure will rise again.

Take your prescribed medication(s)

- Your doctor or nurse may suggest taking an aspirin and a cholesterol pill each day. They can answer any questions you may have about this.

Eat healthy food

- Limit foods that are high in trans and saturated fats. These fats can raise your bad cholesterol (LDL) and lower your good cholesterol (HDL).
  - › Trans fats are found in shortening, store-bought baked goods, and fast food.
  - › Saturated fats are found in fatty meats, full fat milk products (like whole milk and cream), lunch meats, and bacon.
- Follow a low-sodium (salt) diet. This helps to keep your blood pressure in a healthy range.
- Ask to talk to a dietitian if you need help with meal planning.
- Keep a healthy weight.

Lower stress

- Get more exercise (like walking).
- Get enough sleep.
- Talk to other people about your problems.
- Relaxation techniques (like meditation or yoga) may help.

Another way to treat PAD is with surgery. If you need surgery for your PAD, your doctor or nurse will talk about this with you.

Call your doctor or nurse if:

› the pain in your legs gets worse.

› you have leg or foot pain when resting.

› you have a sore on your foot that does not heal or is red, painful, or swollen.

nova scotia health