Peripheral Arterial Disease (PAD)

What is peripheral arterial disease (PAD)?
Peripheral arterial disease (PAD) is a disease where fatty substances called plaque build up in the arteries that supply blood to the brain, organs, and limbs. When plaque builds up it is called atherosclerosis (“ath-er-o-scleh-ro-sis”). Over time, plaque can narrow arteries. This can lower or stop blood flow and is most common in the arteries in the legs. If severe enough, blocked blood flow can cause leg pain, gangrene, or amputation (removal) of the foot or leg. If you have PAD, you have a greater 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 legs, claudication (“claw-di-kay-shun”), or poor circulation.

Symptoms of PAD may include:
- Pain, numbness, achiness, or heaviness in the leg, hip, or buttock muscles brought on by exercise, walking, or climbing stairs (also called claudication).
- Sores or wounds on the toes, feet, or legs that won’t heal, or heal very slowly.
- Pain in the feet when resting.

How do I find out if I have PAD?
Your healthcare provider will ask you questions about your symptoms and do a physical exam. Your healthcare provider may also send you for a test called the Ankle-Brachial Index (ABI). This is a simple test that compares the blood pressure in your ankles with the blood pressure in your arms. An ABI tells your healthcare provider how well blood flows in your legs.
Does PAD cause long-term problems?
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 transient ischemic attack (mini-stroke) or stroke. Narrowed leg arteries can limit your ability to work and affect your overall quality of life. In severe cases, PAD can lead to amputation of the foot or leg.

How is PAD treated?
The treatment of PAD includes lifestyle changes (to control risk factors), medicine, and possible surgery. **Controlling your risk factors is one way to treat PAD.** Anything that damages the inside of your arteries can cause the artery to become narrowed with plaque.

Stop smoking!
- If you smoke, stop now. Smoking is the main cause of PAD due to the damage it causes to your arteries. Quitting smoking will improve your general health and may also decrease your leg pain when you walk.
- If you want to stop smoking, speak to your healthcare provider.
Exercise
• Walking is often the best exercise.
• Exercise is an easy and cheap way to help blood flow to your legs.
• Walking every day for at least 30 minutes will help your body to make extra blood channels. 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 suggested by your healthcare provider.
 › Take your pills or insulin prescribed by your healthcare provider.
 › Check your feet every day for sores, cuts, or calluses.

Control your blood pressure
• Your blood pressure should be checked regularly.
• Take any pills prescribed by your healthcare provider. If you stop taking the pills or take them only now and then, your blood pressure will rise again.
Take prescribed medicine
• You may be asked to take an aspirin and a cholesterol pill every day.
• Your healthcare provider can answer any questions you may have about this.

Eat healthy food
• Foods low in certain fats will help lower your cholesterol (the fatty material in your blood).
• Follow a low-sodium (salt) diet.
• Ask to talk to a dietitian if you need help with meal planning.
• Keep a healthy weight.

Lower stress
• Get more exercise.
• Get plenty of sleep.
• Talk to other people about your problems.
• Relaxation techniques such as meditation or yoga may help.

Another way to treat PAD is with surgery. You can talk about this with your surgeon.

If you have any questions, please ask. We are here to help you.
Call your healthcare provider if:

› Pain in your legs gets worse.
› You get leg or foot pain when resting.
› You get a sore that does not heal or is red, painful, or swollen.

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