Supervised Exercise Therapy for Peripheral Artery Disease

Peripheral arterial disease (PAD) is the narrowing or blockage of arteries. This can cause reduced blood flow to the arms and legs.

Plaque Buildup
The most common cause of PAD is the buildup of plaque overtime on the inside of arteries. Buildup can affect arteries that supply blood to the legs. Plaque is made of extra cholesterol, calcium, and other material in the blood.

Some things that cause plaque buildup include:

- High cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Smoking
- Other factors

Plaque buildup prevents blood from flowing freely. In result, this starves the muscles of the blood and oxygen it needs.

Intermittent Claudication
Poor blood flow in the legs can cause pain. This is called intermittent claudication. This affects daily activities such as walking. Pain usually disappears after several minutes of rest. It will typically occur at the same distance every time.

Symptoms
Signs of intermittent claudication include:

- Cramping
- Tightness
- Aching
- Burning
- Heaviness
- Or tired feeling in the calf, thigh, hip, or buttocks.

Supervised Exercise Therapy for PAD
Supervised exercise therapy for peripheral artery disease (SET PAD) is a special exercise program. The goal is to make it easier to walk further with less pain.

Walking trains your muscles to work with the reduced blood flow and oxygen caused by PAD. It strengthens your leg muscles and enables you to be active. Walking can help slow the progression of PAD.

Length of Program
Insurance often covers 36 sessions to be completed within 12 weeks. Exercise sessions take place 3-5 days/week. It is important to walk at least 3-5 days/week to benefit from this program.

Sessions
Each session involves walking until you reach a point of discomfort. After that, rest until the discomfort settles. Then, you'llwalk again. This is the process in which triggers the body to adapt and improve.

The goal over the first few weeks is to reach 35 minutes of walking in bouts of 8-10 minutes.

Overtime, you will progress to 50 minutes of walking completed in bouts with rest breaks. Throughout the program, the difficulty will be increased as symptoms begin to improve.

Do not push through chest pain or discomfort.

Home Care
Try to walk at least 5 days each week. You do not need to walk on the days that you come to rehab. Try to walk for the same duration that you are walking in rehab.

Walk until you feel ___level of pain on the claudication scale and then stop to rest until the pain resolves before starting again.

#	Pain Level
1	No Pain
2	Onset of Pain
3	Mild Pain
4	Moderate
5	Severe

The goal is to establish a walking routine that can be maintained for a lifetime. If you stop your walking routine, you will likely lose any progress you made in the program.

Who to Call
Preventive Cardiology
(608) 263-7420
https://www.uwhealth.org/heartandvascular

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 7/2025 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#8446.