

Peripheral Arterial Disease

Peripheral arterial disease (PAD) is caused by a blockage or narrowing of the arteries in the legs when fatty deposits, called plaque, buildup. This buildup causes the arteries to harden and narrow, called atherosclerosis. This results in reduced blood flow to the legs and feet.

PAD occurs most often in the arteries in the legs, but it can also affect other arteries that carry blood outside the heart. This includes arteries that go to the aorta, the brain, the arms, the kidneys, and the stomach. When arteries inside the heart are hardened or narrowed, it is called coronary artery disease or cardiovascular disease.

PAD affects one in five people over the age of 70. People with PAD have a much greater chance of death from a heart attack or stroke. PAD and diabetes are the leading causes of foot and leg amputations.

Risk Factors

Risk include:

- Smoking
- High cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Physical inactivity
- Obesity
- Diabetes

Symptoms

The symptoms include:

- Fatigue, tiredness, or pain in your legs, thighs, or buttocks that always happens when you walk but goes away when you rest.

- Foot or toe pain at rest that often disturbs your sleep.
- Skin wounds or ulcers on your feet or toes that are slow to heal (or that do not heal for 8 to 12 weeks)

But, many people with PAD do not have these symptoms.

When to Get Help

Do not ignore leg pain. It is important to discuss any leg or thigh pain that you are having with your podiatric doctor since it could be a warning sign of a serious disease such as PAD. Early treatment can slow the the disease and decrease the chance of heart attack and stroke.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Your podiatric doctor can do a simple test called an ABI, or ankle-brachial index. It compares the blood pressure in your ankles with the blood pressure in your arm. If your ABI is abnormal, your doctor may order other tests.

PAD can be treated with lifestyle changes, medicines, and surgery if needed. Treatment options include:

- Quitting smoking
- Controlling blood pressure
- Lowering cholesterol
- Managing high blood sugar (diabetes)
- Blood thinners
- Eating a healthy diet
- Following an exercise program