

What is PAD?



Peripheral artery disease (PAD) is a condition that reduces blood flow to the extremities. PAD most often affects the legs. Usually, blood flows freely through the arteries. When lipids, cholesterol, and plaque build up in the walls of arteries, it can cause narrowing or even a complete blockage. Plaques in the arteries are also called atherosclerosis. When oxygen-rich blood traveling to the legs is blocked, it can cause symptoms. Atherosclerosis is the same process that causes heart attacks and strokes. Therefore, those with PAD are at risk for heart attacks and strokes as well. The information below is only about symptoms that occur in the legs.

What are the symptoms of PAD?

At first, many people with PAD do not notice any symptoms. Some people have trouble walking, but they may think it is due to other conditions, aging, and/or lack of exercise rather than PAD. PAD can also cause the following symptoms:



Claudication: This is pain in the muscles of the buttocks and/or legs. The pain occurs when the muscles require more oxygen while walking and gets better shortly after stopping.



Slow wound healing: This is caused by decreased blood flow to wounds. This usually occurs in the lower legs or feet. Sometimes the wounds can get infected.



Acute limb ischemia: This occurs when blood flow to the leg suddenly stops. The leg may be cool, pale, and painful. It is a medical emergency requiring immediate attention.

What causes PAD?

- Smoking (this is the greatest risk factor for PAD)
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Chronic kidney disease
- Not getting enough physical activity

What tests check for PAD?

- **Ankle-brachial index (ABI):** A healthcare provider places blood pressure cuffs on the arm and leg. The test compares the blood pressure in each area.
- **Ultrasound:** Sound waves measure blood flow and show how much the arteries have narrowed.
- **CT angiography:** The patient lies in a large X-ray scanner. Contrast dye is injected into the body during the scan. This gives a detailed picture of the arteries in the legs.
- **Invasive angiography:** A healthcare provider places a catheter in a blood vessel in the wrist or groin to inject dye. X-rays are used to check for narrowed or blocked arteries.

How is PAD treated?

Medications



- Aspirin and other blood thinners help blood flow through narrow arteries.
- Cholesterol medicines, such as statins, help prevent plaque from building up.
- Blood pressure medicines support healthy blood flow.
- Medicines that treat diabetes can also help prevent nerve damage. Nerve damage due to diabetes can lead to wound infections that heal slowly or not at all due to PAD. Medications to treat diabetes can help lower this risk.
- A medicine called cilostazol may help blood flow more easily. It can also help reduce symptoms of claudication.

Diet and Lifestyle



- Don't use tobacco or nicotine products. If you do, work on quitting.
- Eat a healthy diet. Choose high-fiber and plant-based foods. Limit processed and fatty foods.
- Exercise regularly as directed by your doctor. A walking program can greatly reduce symptoms of claudication.
 - Go to healthmapsolutions.com/patient-resources to download "Exercising for Health" for helpful workout tips.

Procedures



- Revascularization procedures are performed when atherosclerosis or plaque limits blood flow, especially if the patient has symptoms. Some of these procedures are minimally invasive. Others are surgeries that remove or bypass the blocked area.
- In very advanced disease, amputation of toes, feet, or legs may be needed if blood flow is so limited that the limb will not survive. This may also occur if an infection cannot be treated due to the lack of blood flow. A major goal in PAD care is to prevent amputation.

How can I prevent PAD?

Treating the risk factors early is the best way to prevent PAD.

- Do not use tobacco or nicotine products.
- Manage diabetes to meet goals set by your doctor.
- Monitor for and treat high blood pressure.
- Lower cholesterol.
- Exercise regularly.
- Ask your doctor about screening tests for PAD to prevent progression.

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