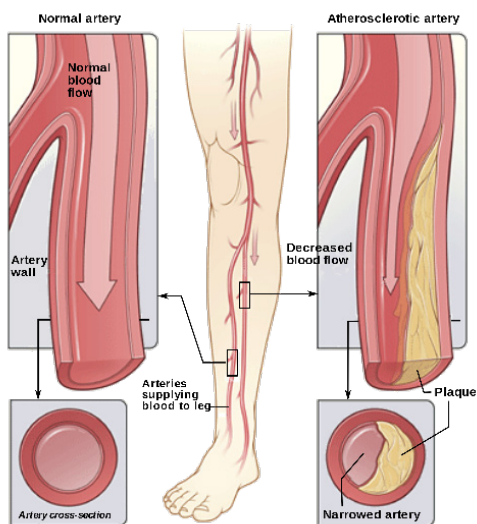




Peripheral Artery Disease

Peripheral artery disease (PAD) is the narrowing or blockage of the arteries that carry blood from your heart to your limbs, causing poor circulation. It is a common, yet serious disease, primarily caused by the buildup of fatty plaque in the arteries, which is called atherosclerosis. PAD can occur in any artery, but it most commonly affects the blood flow in your legs.



A normal artery is shown on the left. The right shows an artery narrowed by atherosclerosis, causing PAD.

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In its most advanced stage, known as critical limb ischemia (CLI), it can cause severe pain in the feet or toes, even while resting. Complications from this type of severe artery blockage may include non-healing sores and wounds on the legs and feet. Left untreated, the complications of CLI could result in amputation of the affected limb.

Peripheral artery disease affects between 8 and 12 million Americans and is associated with an increased risk of heart attack, stroke, limb loss and even death.^{1, 2}

Plaque buildup in the legs does not always cause symptoms, so many people can have PAD and not know it. As the disease progresses, symptoms may include some or all of the following:

- Pain, fatigue, heaviness, tiredness or cramping in the leg muscles (claudication) that occurs during activity such as walking which is relieved by resting. Pain may also be felt in buttocks, thigh or calf³
- Leg numbness or weakness
- Color changes in the skin of the feet, including paleness or blueness
- Coldness in one leg compared to the other leg (skin cool to the touch)
- Poor nail growth and decreased hair growth on toes and legs
- Shiny skin on your legs
- No pulse or a weak pulse in your legs or feet

Early detection and intervention are crucial.

Treatment Options

The overall goals for treating PAD are to reduce symptoms, improve quality of life and mobility and prevent heart attack, stroke and amputation.

When caught early, treatment may include:

1. Making lifestyle changes
2. Taking medication
3. Walking and exercise

Critical limb ischemia, however, is a very severe condition of peripheral artery disease that requires comprehensive treatment by a vascular surgeon or vascular specialist. If the blood flow in one of your limbs is completely or almost completely blocked, it may be necessary to have a procedure or surgery in addition to medications and lifestyle changes. Procedures such as angioplasty and bypass graft surgery are not a cure, but they can improve the blood circulation to your legs.

Because up to 40% of individuals with PAD have no symptoms, it often goes undiagnosed, so it is important to ask your healthcare provider about your risks.

Timely detection and treatment of PAD can improve your quality of life, help you keep your independence and mobility and reduce your risk of heart attack, stroke, leg amputation and even death.

Risk Factors⁴

One in every 20 Americans over the age of 50 has PAD and the risk of PAD increases with age. Other factors that increase your chances of developing the disease include the following:

- **Diabetes** - One in three people over the age of 50 with diabetes is likely to have PAD
- **Smoking** - Smokers or former smokers have up to four times greater risk of PAD
- **High blood pressure** - High blood pressure, also called hypertension, raises the risk of developing plaque in the arteries
- **High cholesterol** - Excess cholesterol and fat in your blood contribute to the formation of plaque in the arteries
- **Heart disease** - If you have heart disease, you have a one in three chance of also having PAD
- **Ethnicity** - African Americans and Hispanic Americans are more than twice as likely to develop PAD

1. American Heart Association. Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics—2004. 2004; Dallas.
2. The PARTNERS program: A national survey of peripheral arterial disease detection, awareness, and treatment. JAMA. 286: 2001; 1317-1324.
3. Creager MA, Loscalzo J. Vascular Diseases of the Extremities. In: Fauci AS, Braunwald E, Kasper DL, et al., eds. Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine. 17e ed. New York: McGraw Hill, 2008.
4. US Department of Health and Human Services. National Institutes of Health; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

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