

Care Gram

Peripheral Arterial Disease

Peripheral Arterial Disease (PAD) is a common, but serious disease that happens when your arteries become clogged with fatty deposits (plaque). The plaque build-up causes arteries to narrow and harden, limiting the blood flow to your legs. Plaque build-up in the legs does not always cause symptoms, so you may have PAD and not know it.

What Are the Risk Factors?

- Over the age of 50
- Smoke or used to smoke
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Family history of heart attack
- Male gender
- Obesity
- African American ethnicity
- History of heart disease
- History of heart attack
- History of a stroke
- Family history of PAD
- Family history of stroke
- Inactive lifestyle

What Are the Warning Signs or Symptoms of PAD?

- Fatigue, heaviness, tiredness, and/or cramping in your leg muscles during activity such as walking or climbing stairs called claudication
 - The pain or discomfort goes away when the activity is stopped, or you are at rest
 - Hanging your legs over the edge of your bed may temporarily relieve your pain
- Numbness of the legs or feet at rest
- Cold legs or feet
- Pain in the legs and/or feet that disturbs sleep
- Sores or wounds on toes, feet, or legs that heal slowly, poorly, or not at all
- Color changes in the skin of the feet that includes blueness or paleness
- Poor nail growth and decreased hair growth on toes and legs
- Pulse in legs and/or feet are weak or absent
- Shiny skin on your legs
- Erectile dysfunction in men

How Is PAD Diagnosed?

Medical and Family History

- Your medical history including the presence of diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and other important factors
- Your status as a current or former smoker
- Your personal and family history of heart disease
- Any symptoms that you may have in your legs while sitting, standing, walking, climbing, or participating in other physical activities
- Your current diet and medicine that you are taking



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Physical Exam

- Pulses are checked in your legs and feet to determine if there is enough blood flowing to these areas
- The color, temperature, and appearance of your legs and feet
- Any signs of poor wound healing on your legs and feet

Diagnostic Tests

Ankle-brachial index (ABI) is a simple test that compares blood pressure readings in your ankles with the blood pressure readings in your arms. PAD also can be measured by taking a blood pressure check of the entire leg (Arterial Survey with Segmental Pressures and Waveforms) and by listening to the sound of blood flow using a special device called a “Doppler.” Both methods may be able to help tell where and how bad the arteries are blocked.

Additional diagnostic tests done in Radiology can pinpoint exactly where a blockage is and help you and your doctor decide what is the best treatment.

Your doctor may also order blood tests to measure cholesterol and check the level of C-reactive protein, which is a marker for heart disease.

What Are My Treatment Options?

There are two major goals for treating PAD – manage the symptoms and prevent the hardening and narrowing of the arteries further.