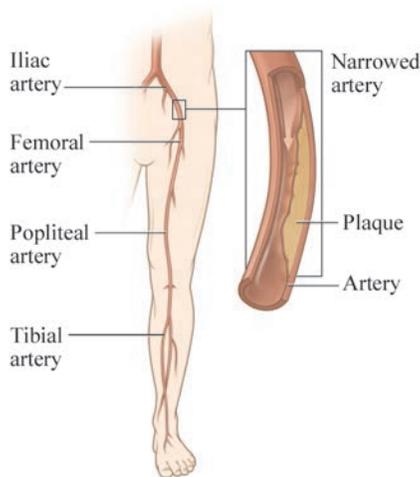


## Peripheral Arterial Disease (PAD)



Peripheral arterial disease (PAD) is narrowing of arteries that results in poor blood flow to your arms and legs. The legs are affected most often. When you walk or exercise, your leg muscles do not get enough blood and you can get painful cramps.

### Causes of PAD

The most common cause of PAD is the buildup of plaque on the inside of your arteries. This buildup is also called "hardening" of the arteries. When that happens, there is less room for blood to flow. This means the muscles and other tissues in your lower body do not get enough blood.

This process of plaque buildup usually happens at the same time throughout your body. If you have hardening of the arteries in your legs, you most likely will have it in the arteries of your heart and brain. This increases your chance of having a heart attack or stroke. But there are things you can do to treat PAD and slow the progress of the disease.

You are more likely to get PAD if you smoke or have high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, or a family history of PAD.

### Symptoms of PAD

Many people who have PAD do not have symptoms. Those who do have symptoms often mistake them for something else, such as a back or muscle problem.

If you do have symptoms, you may have a tight, aching, or squeezing pain in the calf, thigh, or buttock. This pain usually happens after you have walked a certain distance. For example, your pain always starts after you have walked a block or two or after a few minutes. Then the pain goes away if you stop walking.

As PAD gets worse, you might have other symptoms, such as:

- Leg or foot pain when you rest, or pain that remains after you stop walking or exercising.
- Cold or numb feet or toes.
- Sores that are slow to heal.

### Tests for PAD

An ankle-brachial index test is used to help diagnose PAD. The test compares the blood pressure at your ankle and arm both at rest and after light exercise. This tells your doctor if the blood flow in your lower body is not normal.

Your doctor also may use imaging tests, such as a Doppler ultrasound, magnetic resonance angiogram, or CT angiography, to help diagnose PAD.

## Treatment for PAD

Your doctor will probably want you to make lifestyle changes to help relieve symptoms and slow the progress of PAD. Healthy lifestyle changes can also lower your chances of having a heart attack or stroke. And they may also help you feel better and live longer.

These changes include following a heart-healthy diet, following an exercise plan that your doctor suggests, and quitting smoking.

A cardiac rehab program can help you make these lifestyle changes. Ask your doctor if cardiac rehab is right for you.

You may need to take medicines to lower your cholesterol, lower your blood pressure, and manage your symptoms. If you have diabetes, be sure to keep your blood sugar in your target range.

If medicines and lifestyle changes do not help enough, you may need a procedure called angioplasty. In this procedure, the narrow part of the artery is enlarged. Sometimes a small tube called a stent is used to keep the artery open. Some people may need surgery to reroute blood flow to their legs. These treatments are mainly used for severe cases.

## Home care for PAD

Here are some ways to care for yourself:

- If you smoke, try to quit. Medicines and counseling can help you quit for good.
- Take your medicines exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.

- Stay at a healthy weight.
- Talk to your doctor about how a heart-healthy diet and exercise can help you.
- Avoid getting sick from the flu. Get the flu vaccine every year.
- Take good care of your feet.
  - Treat cuts and scrapes on your legs right away. If you have a sore, keep it dry and cover it with a nonstick bandage until you see your doctor.
  - Avoid shoes and socks that are too tight or that rub your feet. Shoes should be comfortable and fit well.
  - Keep your feet clean and moisturized to prevent drying and cracking. Place cotton or lamb's wool between your toes to prevent rubbing and absorb moisture.

## Exercise for PAD

Even though walking causes pain, it may be the best exercise for you.

Talk to your doctor first before you start an exercise plan. Your doctor can help you make a plan that works for you.

Your doctor may suggest a supervised exercise program with both walking and weight training exercises. Or your doctor may recommend a walking program and leg exercises you can do at home.

The goal is to increase how long you can exercise before the pain starts. Each day you will walk until the pain starts, and then rest until it goes away. You will then walk a little farther.