



Your  
Vascular  
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# A Guide for Patients: Peripheral Artery Disease (PAD)



## What is PAD?

**Peripheral Artery Disease (PAD)** happens when the blood vessels in the legs and arms are narrowed or blocked. It is like a heart attack, but in the legs or arms. Without blood, the muscles don't get enough oxygen and nutrients. About 8.5 million Americans have PAD. If not treated, it can even lead to amputation (removal of a limb).

Healthy arteries carry blood smoothly. As people get older, a sticky buildup of fat and cholesterol called plaque can form. This makes the arteries narrow and stiff, slowing down blood flow.



## Symptoms



Pain, cramping or tiredness in the legs (calves, thighs or buttocks) or arms when walking or exercising. This pain goes away with rest. Doctors call this claudication.



As PAD gets worse, pain may even happen when resting, especially at night.



Sores on the feet that do not heal.

## Causes and Risks

You are more likely to get PAD if you:

- Are older
- Are male
- Have high blood pressure
- Have diabetes
- Smoke
- Have high cholesterol
- Are overweight
- Don't exercise much
- Have a family history of blood vessel problems

## Talk to a Doctor

Leg pain doesn't always mean you have PAD. But if you are older, have risk factors, or notice these symptoms, you should talk to your doctor.

See a doctor right away if you:

- Have pain in your legs even when resting
- Have foot sores that don't heal

These be signs that you need to see a vascular surgeon quickly.



## Diagnosis

The ABI test compares the blood pressure in your ankle to the blood pressure in your arm. Your doctor will use a blood pressure cuff and a small device that allows them to hear the blood flow. The test is quick and painless. If the blood pressure in your leg is lower than in your arm, it may mean there is a narrowing or blockage in the blood vessels of your legs.

## Role of a Vascular Surgeon



If you have PAD symptoms, you may want to ask your doctor if a vascular surgeon is right for you. Vascular surgeons are the only specialists trained to diagnose and treat the full spectrum of vascular diseases. They can provide treatments, including medication, minimally invasive procedures and, if needed, open bypass surgery.

## Treatment

There are several treatment options for PAD, depending on your diagnosis. Lifestyle changes can be made to improve symptoms, including:

- Stopping smoking
- Exercising regularly
- Eating a healthy diet and managing weight

Medication may also be a part of your treatment plan. In more serious cases, a procedure may be necessary to open blocked arteries and preserve toes and limbs.

Treatment is important to lower the risk of losing a limb or even your life. Your care team will work with you to determine the best path forward.