

Peripheral Arterial Disease

What is peripheral arterial disease?

Peripheral arterial disease (PAD) is a problem with blood flow in the arteries. Arteries carry blood to the muscles and organs in your body. When you have disease in your arteries, they become narrow or blocked. The most common cause of narrow or blocked arteries is fatty deposits (also called atherosclerosis). High cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, smoking and diabetes can all cause atherosclerosis.

When atherosclerosis affects the arteries in the legs, the problem is called peripheral arterial disease.

Why do my legs hurt?

PAD cuts down the blood flow to the muscles and other tissues in your legs. Claudication is the name for the pain you feel in your calves, legs or buttocks when you walk. Claudication is the most common complaint of people with PAD. The pain happens when you walk. It goes away after a few minutes of rest.

How can my doctor be sure I have PAD?

Your doctor may suspect that your arteries have narrowed by listening to the blood flow in them, using a stethoscope. Then he or she may do some tests to see if you have PAD. Your doctor may also do tests to see if arteries in other parts of your body have atherosclerosis.

Can PAD be treated?

Yes. PAD is often treated with diet and exercise, and sometimes medicine. People with PAD must stop smoking. It is important for people with PAD to bring down high cholesterol, high blood pressure and high blood sugar levels. A walking program is very helpful. You should walk at least 3 times a week for 30 to 45 minutes each time. Walk until the pain is too uncomfortable. Stop and rest until the pain goes away. Then start walking again.

Medicine can help some people. Ask your doctor if medicine is right for you. If your arteries are badly blocked, you may need surgery to open them up.

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