

Smoking and your circulation

This leaflet is intended to provide simple practical information about how smoking can affect your feet and legs.

You may have been advised to give up smoking as it is the greatest single cause of ill health and premature death in the UK.

Smokers have a 1 in 2 risk of getting ill and dying early from smoking related diseases.

One of the major health problems caused by smoking is vascular disease.

Smoking causes blood vessels to narrow and become blocked.

Smoking causes arteriosclerosis - a build-up of fatty deposits in the vessels and loss of elasticity of the vessel walls. If the blood cannot flow freely through the vessels, then it can block and lead to partial or total loss of circulation which could ultimately result in sores, ulceration, gangrene and amputation.

Blood vessels become weak and expand. This is called an aneurysm, which may burst. This is potentially life threatening.

Smoking can cause:

Painful sores and ulcers on your feet and toes. This is the start of reduced blood supply to the tissues.

Intermittent claudication:

These are pains in your legs on walking. An indication that muscles and structures are being starved of oxygen and nutrients.

Gangrene:

This is where there is little or no blood to the tissues. As tissues become starved of oxygen and nutrients, the skin, muscles, etc. dies and becomes blackened. This can lead to amputation of toes or even feet and legs.

Buerger's disease:

This occurs mostly in men aged 25 to 45, usually in heavy smokers causing blockages in the small arteries of the feet and lower limbs.

Amputation:

This is where the dead and decaying tissues are cut off either surgically or by dropping off over a period of time.

What you can do

Stop smoking.

Did you know that one cigarette can shut down the little micro vessels in a toe for up to three hours, depriving the skin of life giving oxygen and nourishment!

Take regular exercise; if you have been unable to exercise for some time start gradually but aim to take some exercise every day. Walking is one of the best forms of exercise. The benefits will be to help improve the blood flow to your feet and legs, increase your cardiac output, and improve the condition of your lungs.

Keep your weight down; the strain on the circulation is greater if you are overweight. Eat sensibly and try to lose weight if you have been advised to do so. Eat a selection of '5 a day' of fruit and vegetables. Have your blood pressure and cholesterol level checked. If you are diabetic ensure you have good blood glucose control. This will help prevent further damage to the vessels. Take your medication.

If you have a sore or ulcer on your foot, it is essential that you give up smoking so that we can help you to heal it.

Carbon monoxide is given off when you smoke. This attaches to the red blood cells and stops them carrying oxygen which cells need to stay alive and help healing. If you can improve the blood supply to your feet, you stand a better chance of preventing further ulceration and preventing future gangrene and amputation.

Within twenty minutes of stopping smoking your blood pressure and pulse return to normal. The circulation improves especially to your hands and feet. Within eight hours the oxygen level in your blood increases to a normal level. After two weeks the circulation throughout the body improves, walking and exercise should become easier.

It will not be easy, but it is worth the effort and it is never too late to try

For practical advice call:

NHS Smoking Helpline
03001231044

Or local stop smoking services

Torbay 0300 456 1006
Devon 01392 984 264

www.givingupsmoking.co.uk

It is recommended that you follow the advice in this leaflet and only contact the podiatry department should you need further advice about foot care.

Please contact the Podiatry
Appointment Office
01803 217712
if you:

--require further information
--require this leaflet in a different
format

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.



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PATIENT INFORMATION

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Working with you, for you