

Peripheral arterial disease (PAD)

This occurs where the arteries in the arms and legs become narrow or furred up and lose their elasticity (hardening of the arteries).

If you have PAD, you are also likely to have narrowing of the arteries to your heart and brain. This means you are at greater risk of suffering a heart attack or stroke. Fortunately, there are some things you can do to reduce the risks.

What are the signs of PAD?

- Intermittent claudication. A cramp like pain in one or both legs, usually in the calves, but can occur in the thighs or buttocks. It starts during exercise or walking (especially uphill) and stops with rest.
- Rest pain. Similar to intermittent claudication but pain starts when resting. The pain can be relieved by hanging the legs down over the side of the bed.
- Coldness. One leg or foot may feel colder than the other.

- Change of colour. The skin may be pale and may look blue.
- Loss of hair and nail changes. The legs and feet may lose hair and the nails will grow more slowly.
- Poor healing. If you cut your leg or foot, it may take much longer to heal or it may ulcerate (non-healing wound).
- Gangrene. This is where there is little or no blood or oxygen getting to the tissues, which then die and become blackened. This can lead to amputation of toes, feet or legs.

Who is most at risk of PAD?

- Smokers (the biggest cause)
- Overweight
- High fat diet/high cholesterol
- Little or no exercise
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Kidney disease
- History of stroke or heart disease
- Asthma or COPD
- Family history
- Age-older people are more at risk

How can I help myself?

- Regular exercise. This will help to reduce symptoms and even helps to improve blood flow to the legs by developing extra (collateral) blood vessels.
- Walking 25 minutes daily is recommended, but this can be broken down into shorter periods over the day.
- Do not exercise if you experience chest pain or feel unwell. Seek urgent medical attention.
- Maintain a healthy weight. The effects of being overweight include higher blood pressure and cholesterol and increases the risk of developing diabetes.
- Eat a Healthy, Balanced and Varied Diet. Base your meals on starchy carbohydrates, eat lots of fruit and vegetables, eat more fish and cut down on saturated fat, sugar and salt.
- Check it out. Have regular checks for cholesterol, blood pressure and diabetes.
- Medicines. Evidence suggests that a low dose of aspirin or clopidogrel, blood pressure medicine, and cholesterol lowering medication may help to reduce the risk of PAD. Seek advice from your doctor or pharmacist.

PATIENT INFORMATION

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Surgical Options:

Most people will not need surgery if they follow the lifestyle changes advised in this leaflet. If you do need surgery, the following options are available:

- Angioplasty - a narrowed blood vessel is 'stretched' from within with a tiny 'balloon'.
- Bypass graft. A section of the narrowed blood vessel is replaced either with one of your veins or with a synthetic tube.

Amputation is rare and is only done if there is no other way to save the leg or foot.

Conclusion

PAD is a serious condition which increases the risk of heart attack or stroke. There are medicines which can help to prevent symptoms from getting worse but it is just as important that you change your lifestyle, as living a healthy lifestyle can greatly reduce your risk of getting complications from PAD.

Please contact the podiatry department on (01803) 217712 if you:-

- have any questions about the information in this leaflet
- 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.