

Peripheral Arterial Disease

Arteries carry blood from the heart to all areas of the body and, when healthy, have a smooth lining that promotes blood flow and helps to prevent blood clots. **Peripheral arterial disease (PAD)** is a condition in which fatty deposits (called plaque) build up along the walls of the arteries that carry blood to the arms and legs. This is also known as **atherosclerosis** or hardening of the arteries. The arteries slowly narrow and may even become blocked, affecting blood circulation, especially in the legs and feet. The February 1, 2006, issue of *JAMA* includes 2 articles about PAD. This Patient Page is based on one previously published in the September 19, 2001, issue of *JAMA*.

SYMPTOMS OF PAD

- Painful cramping of the leg or hip muscles during walking, in some cases severe enough to hinder walking, that stops during rest; or numbness, weakness, or a feeling of heaviness in the legs with no pain
- Cooling of the skin in specific areas of the legs or feet
- Color changes in the skin, particularly in the arms or legs
- Toe and foot sores that do not heal promptly
- Burning or aching in the feet and toes while at rest and particularly while lying flat (this is a sign of more severe PAD)

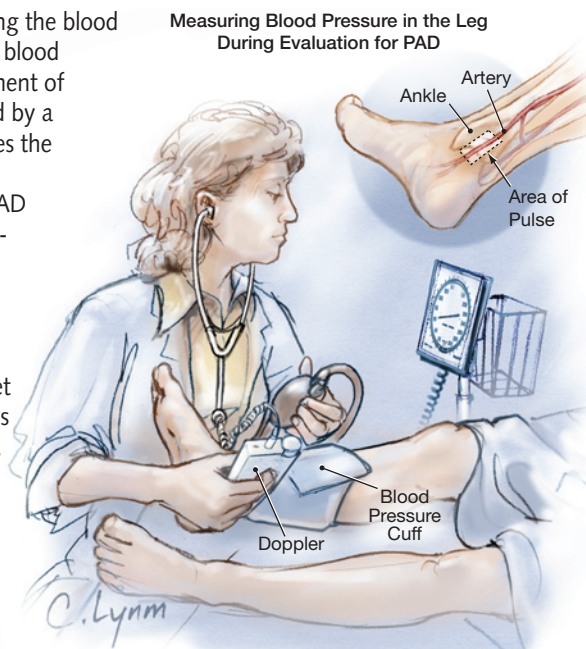
RISK FACTORS OF PAD

- Smoking is the number one risk factor for PAD and will interfere with treatment of the disease. Individuals with PAD should stop smoking completely because even 1 or 2 cigarettes daily can affect treatment.
- Older age is a predictor for PAD—it occurs more frequently in those individuals 60 years of age or older.
- Diabetes is a significant risk factor for PAD. Individuals with diabetes should keep strict control of their blood sugar to avoid serious problems resulting from PAD.
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol levels

DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

Tests for PAD include comparing the blood pressure in the ankle with the blood pressure in the arm. Measurement of ankle blood pressure is assisted by a **Doppler** device, which amplifies the sound of blood flow.

Your doctor can test you for PAD and recommend the best treatment to stop or even reverse the buildup of plaque in the arteries. Individuals with PAD should quit smoking, exercise regularly, and eat a healthy diet low in fat and salt. Medications to control high blood pressure, high cholesterol, high blood sugar, and blood clotting are often important.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Heart Association
www.americanheart.org
- Vascular Disease Foundation
www.vdf.org

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page link on JAMA's Web site at www.jama.com. Many are available in English and Spanish.

Sources: American Heart Association, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institutes of Health, Society of Cardiovascular & Interventional Radiology, Vascular Disease Foundation, World Health Organization

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