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## Peripheral Arterial Disease (P.A.D.)

Peripheral Arterial Disease, commonly referred to as P.A.D. or hardening of the arteries, is caused by a buildup of plaque. The arteries become clogged, narrowed, and hardened, which is called atherosclerosis. Blood flow to the legs and feet is reduced, which some people call "poor circulation". While it occurs most often in the arteries in the legs, it can affect other arteries that carry blood outside the heart, which go to the aorta, brain, arms, kidneys and the stomach. When the arteries inside the heart are hardened and narrowed, it is called coronary artery disease or cardiovascular disease.

### **Take P.A.D. Seriously!**

Lower-extremity P.A.D. is a serious disease that affects 8 million Americans. Hardened arteries found in people with P.A.D. are a red flag sign that they are likely to have hardened and narrowed arteries to the heart and brain, and therefore are at a higher risk for having a heart attack or stroke. When blood flow to the legs is greatly reduced, people with P.A.D. may have pain when walking, and may cause other problems leading to amputation.

### **Who is At Risk of P.A.D.?**

The chance of having P.A.D. increases as you get older. People over age 50 have a higher risk for P.A.D., but the risk is increased if you:

- Smoke, or used to smoke;
- Have diabetes;
- Have high blood pressure;
- Have abnormal blood cholesterol levels;
- Have had heart disease, a heart attack or stroke; and/or
- Are of African American ethnicity.

### **What are the Signs and Symptoms of P.A.D.?**

Many people with P.A.D. do not have obvious symptoms. But some people with the disease may have:

- Leg muscle pain that occurs with walking and goes away with rest. This symptom is called "claudication";
- Foot or toe pain at rest that often disturbs sleep;
- Skin wounds or ulcers on the feet or toes that are slow to heal (non-healing for 8-12 weeks).

## **P.A.D. Screening & Treatment**

P.A.D. Screening is available to detect Peripheral Arterial Disease. Screening is done by using the ankle-brachial index (ABI). This screening is painless, quick, and non-invasive. Pressure cuffs are applied to arms and legs during testing.

The good news is that early detection provides the opportunity to properly treat P.A.D. by making lifestyle changes (nutrition, exercise, etc.) medications, and/or having an endovascular or surgical procedure.

## **Prevention**

Don't wait to get a diagnosis. Here are some steps you can take now to improve your vascular health:

- Know your numbers. Ask your health care provider to check blood pressure, cholesterol and blood glucose. Seek recommendations when the numbers are not normal.
- Take medications as prescribed.
- Be active for at least 30 minutes most days of the week
- Stop smoking
- Maintain a healthy weight or lost weight
- Eat low-fat meals high in fruits, vegetables and whole grain foods.

This article was created from information located on the Cardiovascular Coalition website. Please [visit this website](#) for more information on P.A.D., screenings, and other resources.

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