

# Do You Suffer From PAD and Not Even Know It?



Do your legs hurt or become cramped while walking? When you stop to rest does the pain go away, but return when you start to move again? You may be experiencing classic symptoms of intermittent claudication as a result from peripheral arterial disease (PAD). PAD, previously called PVD (peripheral vascular disease), refers to restricted blood flow in the legs due to blocked arteries. PAD affects about one in 20 people over the age of 50. People who have claudication also usually have heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels.

While more than half of people with PAD have leg pain or numbness, the disease often goes undiagnosed. Luckily, testing for PAD is relatively simple. A comparison of the systolic blood pressure at the ankle and elbow (called the ankle-brachial index, or ABI) is used. An abnormal ankle-brachial index (ABI less than 1) strongly suggests the presence of PAD.

Once a person is diagnosed with PAD, There are several treatment plans that are available to control the symptoms and halt the progression of the disease. Specific treatment will be determined by your physician and may include:

- Lifestyle modifications to control risk factors, including regular exercise, proper nutrition, and smoking cessation
- Aggressive treatment of existing conditions that may aggravate PAD, such as diabetes, hypertension and elevated blood cholesterol
- Medications for improving blood flow, such as blood thinners and medications that relax the blood vessel walls
- Surgical interventions
  - Angioplasty - a catheter (long hollow tube) is used to create a larger opening in an artery to increase blood flow. Angioplasty may be performed in many of the arteries in the body.
  - Vascular surgery - a bypass graft using a blood vessel from another part of the body or a tube made of synthetic material is placed in the area of the blocked or narrowed artery to reroute the blood flow

You can help to lower your risk for PAD by making changes in your lifestyle. Consider stopping smoking, begin to eat a healthy diet and start an exercise plan which includes walking. Research studies have shown that if you quit smoking and exercise regularly, that the symptoms of PAD are unlikely to become worse and often improve. Losing weight also helps by reducing the demands on the heart and leg muscles. Please make sure to consult with your physician before starting any exercise program.

