

# Step On Up: Peripheral Arterial Disease (PAD)

## What is PAD?

PAD is a common condition in which narrowed blood vessels reduce blood flow to your arms or legs. Many people with PAD don't have symptoms until it is advanced, causing severe leg pain and leading to possible amputation. People who are Black, American Indian, or LatinX are at greater risk.

**If you have PAD, you are at a higher risk for a heart attack or stroke than people who do not have PAD.**

### Check off your risk factors:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black Americans       | <input type="checkbox"/> Diabetes           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Age over 65 years     | <input type="checkbox"/> Kidney disease     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family history of PAD | <input type="checkbox"/> Tobacco use        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High blood pressure   | <input type="checkbox"/> Obesity            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High cholesterol      | <input type="checkbox"/> Inactive lifestyle |

**Screening for PAD, in those with risk factors, may save a limb and save a life!**

**Early detection and treatment of PAD is important.**

### Know Your Signs and Symptoms:

- Cold feet
- Foot sores
- Hair loss on legs and feet
- Leg pain while at rest
- Erectile dysfunction
- Shiny or discolored skin on the legs
- Legs or feet feel numb, weak, or heavy during normal activity but feel better when you rest
- Pain in the buttocks, hips, thighs, or calf with normal activity

**Some people think their leg pain is just because they are getting old or aren't as active. Always check with a health care professional if you have leg pain.**



## Steps to PAD Diagnosis

Early detection and management of PAD:

- improves leg pain and weakness
- increases walking distance
- lowers your risk of non-healing ulcers and loss of limbs
- lowers your risk of heart attack and stroke

To see if you have PAD, your provider will ask you about your health history and symptoms, and do a physical exam.

## Tests to Diagnose PAD

- **Ankle Brachial Index (ABI):** compares blood pressure in arm and ankle at rest, or after walking
- **Duplex ultrasound:** looks at how blood flows through your blood vessels, and if there are any blockages
- **Angiography:** dye is injected into your blood vessels, and your blood flow is watched to see if there are blockages

# Step On Up: Peripheral Arterial Disease (PAD)

While there is no cure for PAD, your healthcare team will help you manage your symptoms and keep them from getting worse. They will work with you to select the treatment that is right for you.

## Treatments

### Lifestyle

- If you smoke or use any tobacco products, STOP.
- You may attend Structured Exercise Therapy which includes walking on a treadmill, with intermittent rest periods when pain becomes moderate to severe.
- A home or community-based walking program designed by a qualified healthcare professional
- Eat a heart-healthy diet to improve your cholesterol, limit salt, and manage your weight.
- Take medicines prescribed for diabetes, high blood pressure, or high cholesterol.
- Preventive foot care which includes regular inspection of lower extremities and possibly therapeutic footwear

In addition to PAD management and improvement, these lifestyle recommendations will impact your heart and overall health and well-being to live a long, productive, active life.

### Medicines

If you have PAD, medicines help manage symptoms and lower your risk of heart attack, stroke, or death.

- High-intensity statin medication to reduce risk of heart attack and stroke
- If not at increased risk for bleeding, aspirin 81 mg daily plus rivaroxaban (blood thinner) 2.5 mg 2 times daily
- Along with aspirin, rivaroxaban lowers your risk of a sudden decrease in blood flow to your legs, or amputation.
- Get a flu and COVID shot each year.
- If no congestive heart failure a medicine to prevent clumping of platelets, like cilostazol, which increases blood flow to your legs may be prescribed to increase walking distance with less pain



- Medicines to treat high blood pressure
- Medicines to treat diabetes which have been shown to reduce the risk of heart attack

### Procedures and Surgery

You may need a procedure or surgery, such as one of these:

- **Angioplasty:** a long, thin tube is put into your blocked or narrowed artery. A tiny balloon at the tip of the tube is inflated, widening the area for blood flow.
- **Stent:** a small tube is placed in your artery to help keep it open for more blood flow
- **Atherectomy:** the fatty deposits are removed from your artery that is blocked or has become narrow
- **Leg bypass graft:** a healthy vein from another part of your body is moved to create a new way for your blood to get around a blocked artery in your leg

### More Resources

Information and tools: [savelegschangelives.com](https://www.savelegschangelives.com)

Decision aid to help those with PAD: [showme-pad.org](https://www.showme-pad.org)

American Heart Association/American College of Cardiology Guidelines on the Management of Patients with Peripheral Artery Disease.