

# 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 September 19, 2001, issue of JAMA includes a study of the frequency of PAD.

## 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
- Burning or aching in the feet and toes while at rest and particularly while lying flat (this is a sign of more severe PAD)
- 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

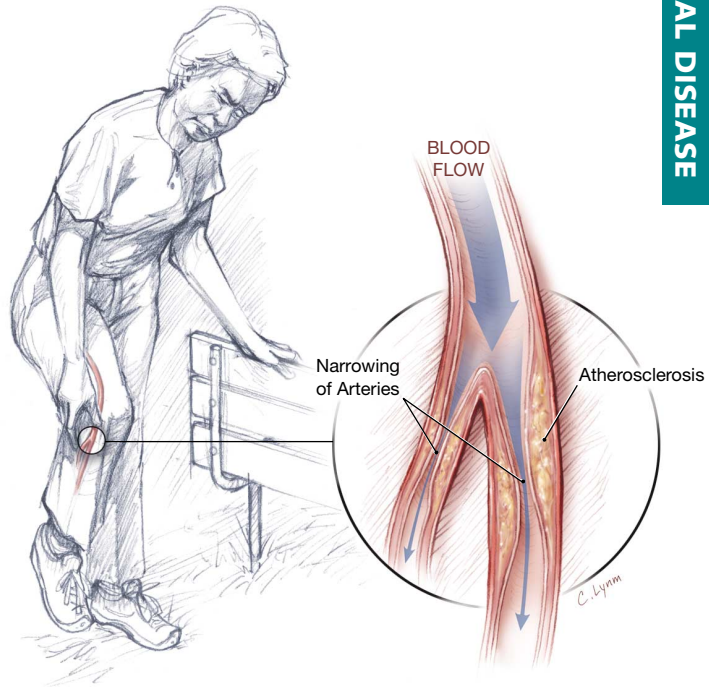
## RISK FACTORS FOR PAD

- Smoking is the number one risk factor for PAD and will interfere with treatment of the disease. People with PAD should stop smoking completely because even 1 or 2 cigarettes daily can affect treatment.
- Diabetes is a significant risk factor for PAD. People with diabetes should keep strict control of their blood sugar to avoid serious problems resulting from PAD.
- Older age is a predictor for PAD—it occurs more frequently in those 60 years of age or older.
- People with a family history of heart disease are at greater risk for PAD.
- High blood pressure is a risk factor because it causes damage to the artery walls, which can lead to PAD.

## TREATMENT

The buildup of plaque in arteries that occurs in PAD can often be stopped or even reversed. People with PAD should quit smoking, exercise regularly, and eat a healthy diet low in fat and salt. In more serious cases, medication, surgery, or both may be necessary to treat PAD. Your doctor can test you for PAD and recommend the best treatment.

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



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Heart Association  
800/242-8721  
[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)
- Society of Cardiovascular & Interventional Radiology  
800/488-7284  
[www.scvir.org](http://www.scvir.org)
- Vascular Disease Foundation  
866/723-4636  
[www.vdf.org](http://www.vdf.org)

## INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page Index on JAMA's Web site at [www.jama.com](http://www.jama.com). JAMA Patient Pages on cholesterol and atherosclerosis were published on January 13, 1999, and May 16, 2001.

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