

# Peripheral Artery Disease Patient Guide

Peripheral Artery Disease or PAD is a common condition affecting about 8.5 million Americans.\* However, PAD often goes undiagnosed and symptoms such as leg cramps and walking difficulties are mistakenly attributed to aging or other health issues.

PAD is sometimes referred to as Peripheral Vascular Disease or PVD. By becoming educated on this condition, knowing what to look for and taking an active stance, you can improve mobility and reduce subsequent health issues.

## What you need to know about PAD

PAD is a narrowing of the blood vessels that supply your legs, feet and arms with fresh blood. In PAD, fatty deposits within the walls of blood vessels cause a narrowing of the blood vessels which slows blood flow to tissue. This can eventually lead to blockages.

Because it involves blood supply to your limbs, PAD can impact mobility. It may make walking painful. If the blood flow to your arms or legs is severely cut off, it can cause irreparable tissue damage.

PAD greatly increases your risk of dying from heart disease or stroke, even if you don't have symptoms. People with PAD can develop dangerous blood clots in narrowed arteries, and these clots can break off and travel throughout your body and cause a heart attack or stroke.

## What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms are cramping, pain or tiredness in your legs, hip muscles or buttocks while walking or climbing stairs. Characteristically, this pain goes away when you rest and returns when you walk again. However, up to 40% of those who suffer from PAD do not experience these symptoms.\*

In later stages, circulation may be so poor that you have pain in your toes and feet even while you are at rest, especially at night. In the most advanced stages, the blood vessels to your legs and feet are

so blocked that they do not get adequate blood supply. This can lead to sores, gangrene (dead tissue) and can even require amputation.

Other symptoms may include:

- ▶ Difficulty walking
- ▶ Muscle cramping in legs or hips after walking (called intermittent claudication)
- ▶ Numbness, weakness or heaviness in muscles
- ▶ Cooling of skin in legs or feet
- ▶ Color changes in skin, particularly arms or legs
- ▶ Toe and foot sores that do not heal
- ▶ Burning or aching in feet and toes

If you experience any of these symptoms, you should call your doctor. Prompt action may preserve your mobility.

## Who is at risk?

Smoking is the number one risk factor for PAD. Additionally, your risk of developing PAD increases steadily as you grow older. If you have diabetes or heart disease, you also have a much greater chance of developing PAD.

Modifiable Risk Factors are:

- ▶ Smoking
- ▶ Diabetes
- ▶ High blood pressure
- ▶ Obesity
- ▶ Lack of exercise
- ▶ High cholesterol

Non-Modifiable Risk Factors are:

- ▶ Heart disease
- ▶ Age
- ▶ Family history of heart disease or PAD

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\*Statistics are taken from the American Heart Association

## How to find out if you have PAD

There are many tests that can determine if you have PAD. These include:

- ▶ **Physical exam:** Your doctor may suspect PAD based on your symptoms and risk factors. By taking pulses on areas of your legs and feet and listening to blood flow through a stethoscope, your doctor can get a basic indication of possible PAD. A foot examination shows sores and other indicators of PAD.
- ▶ **Ankle-brachial index:** This simple ultrasound test compares the blood flow in your ankle to the blood pressure in your arm to screen for PAD.
- ▶ **Doppler ultrasound testing:** For this safe, simple and painless test an ultrasound technician passes a high-frequency wand over your legs using sound waves to measure blood flow to your legs. This can determine if you have narrowed arteries or blockages.
- ▶ **Arteriogram:** By injecting dye into your blood vessels, an arteriogram draws a map of your arteries on a computer screen to clearly showing blood flow and indicating any narrowing or blockages.

## How PAD is treated

The type of treatment you get depends on your specific condition, overall health and other factors. Potential treatments include:

- ▶ **Lifestyle modifications:** Most cases of PAD can be managed by making changes to your lifestyle. Many patients find relief once they stop smoking, lose weight and start exercising.
- ▶ **Medication:** Your doctor may prescribe medications to lower high blood pressure or high cholesterol or medication to manage diabetes. Pain-relief medication also is an option.
- ▶ **Endovascular treatment:** Vascular surgeons make an incision in your groin and thread a catheter through your vein to the site of the blockage. Then they inflate a balloon to enlarge the artery to its normal size or place a stent (a tiny, mesh scaffold) to hold your artery open.
- ▶ **Vascular surgery:** If a long portion of an artery is blocked, vascular surgeons can reroute blood flow from an area above the blockage to an area below the blockage, using either a piece of synthetic material or a vein from another part of your body.
- ▶ **Thrombolytic therapy:** If you have a blood clot blocking an artery, your doctor may inject a clot-dissolving drug into your artery at the point of the clot to dissolve it.

Most procedures require no more than an overnight hospital stay, and patients enjoy an early return to most normal activities.

## About the Vascular Center at Edward-Elmhurst Heart Hospital

The Vascular Center at Edward-Elmhurst Heart Hospital in Naperville offers all the services you need to evaluate and treat vascular conditions.

### Expertise

Every year we treat thousands of patients with PAD and often are the first to offer new procedures that aim to save limbs and restore mobility. We offer a full range of diagnostic and treatment approaches, always using the least-invasive procedure available.

### Team of Physicians

Edward-Elmhurst Heart Hospital has a highly regarded team of vascular specialists, including surgeons, interventional radiologists and technicians. We have extensive experience caring for patients with PAD, including complex, high risk patients with other health conditions.

### Advanced Technology

We have the most advanced screening technology available, along with a dedicated vascular operating room and a new endovascular treatment area.

### Outstanding Results

Our PAD patients report that treatment leads to a dramatic increase in mobility. We have also been able to reduce the frequency of limb loss and life-threatening complications from PAD.

### Patient-Friendly Hospital

We set out to build a place that would treat heart disease in a revolutionary way. The result was the Edward-Elmhurst Heart Hospital: the first and only hospital of its kind in Illinois. We've combined the most advanced technology with every possible patient comfort. From inpatient and outpatient services to physician offices and top notch prevention programs, everything is under one roof and provided by an expert staff focused entirely on cardiac medicine.

### Nurse Heart Line

(630) 527-2825

EEHealth.org