

What is Peripheral Artery Disease?

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Peripheral artery disease is a condition in which the arteries in the legs become blocked, or occluded. Your arteries are normally smooth on the inside to allow blood to flow freely. As you become older, the arteries sometimes become clogged with plaque. Plaque is made up of cholesterol and fatty materials that thicken, harden and may eventually block the arteries.

Eventually enough plaque may build up and reduce the blood flow and oxygen to your legs. This condition can cause pain when walking; and when severe, may require treatment to prevent limb loss.

What are the symptoms of peripheral artery disease?

The most common symptom of peripheral artery disease is pain that worsens as you walk and goes away when you rest. This pain is called intermittent claudication. You may also have the following symptoms of intermittent claudication in the legs:

- Tightness
- Cramping
- Heaviness
- Weakness

In some situations, patients with peripheral artery disease may develop sores or ulcers on the feet and/or legs that do not heal.

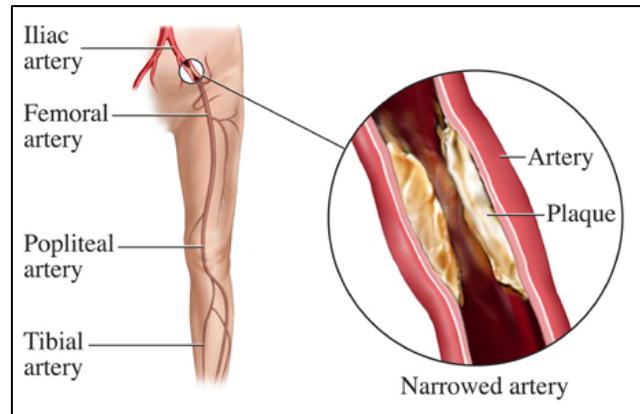


Image Source: health.yahoo.com

What conditions increase the risk for peripheral artery disease?

There are certain conditions and lifestyle habits that increase your risk for peripheral artery disease. These include:

- Smoking
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Weighing more than 30% of ideal weight
- High fat, high cholesterol diet

How is peripheral artery disease diagnosed?

One or more of the following diagnostic tests may be ordered by your physician to diagnose peripheral artery disease:

- *Arterial Doppler testing*, which uses ultrasound and blood pressure cuffs to measure pressure in legs.
- *Blood test* for cholesterol level

- *Duplex ultrasound*, which uses sound waves to measure the blood flow in your legs and to detect blockages
- *Magnetic resonance angiography*, or MRA, which uses magnetic fields and radio waves to detect blockages
- *Angiography*, which uses x-ray and contrast dye to highlight the blood flow and any blockages in the arteries of your legs.

How is peripheral artery disease treated?

The main treatments for peripheral artery disease are lifestyle changes, medications, and sometimes angioplasty to widen the blood vessel. Bypass surgery may be necessary depending upon the severity. This is surgery to create a detour around the narrowed or blocked portion of an artery.

The following is a list of lifestyle changes that are recommended when you have peripheral artery disease:

- Follow a heart healthy diet that is low in fat, cholesterol and sodium
- Inspect your legs, feet, and toes daily for blisters, skin breaks, and discolored areas. Report to your physician breaks in the skin that do not heal in 2 to 3 days.
- Clean cuts or abrasions with soap and water, and protect from further injury.
- Wash your legs and feet daily with warm water and a mild soap. Rinse and dry thoroughly, and put on clean cotton or woolen socks to keep your feet warm.
- Trim toenails straight across

- Do not cut, file, or use over-the-counter medications on corns or calluses. This may cause sores that may not heal.
- Do not apply direct heat to legs or feet, such as hot water bottles, hot bath water, or electric heating pads as this may cause burns.
- Avoid injury to your feet and legs. Never go bare foot. Wear the correct fitting shoes and stockings/socks. Turn on lights at night to prevent bumping or stubbing your feet/toes. Do not scratch at the skin on your legs.
- Avoid wearing tight-fitting knee-hi's, stockings, garters, girdles, underwear with elastic around the leg openings, or other constrictive clothing. This will also decrease the blood flow to your legs and feet.
- Avoid crossing your legs and sitting or standing for long periods of time.
- Exercise and walking at least 3 to 4 times a week may improve your symptoms. Walk to tolerance, and attempt to increase the time each week until you are able to walk without pain for 30 to 60 minutes.
- Avoid tobacco products/smoking. This causes nicotine buildup and constriction of blood vessels, which will worsen your condition.
- Maintain regular follow up appointments with your physician.
- If your symptoms worsen, call your physician right away.

Source:

Society for Vascular Surgery @ www.vascularweb.org

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