



What Is Peripheral Artery Disease?

lower-extremity PAD, in which blood flow to the legs and feet is reduced.

PAD is a form of atherosclerosis, the buildup of fatty deposits and other substances in the arteries of the lower extremities. Atherosclerosis narrows and blocks arteries throughout the body, including in the heart, brain, arms, legs, pelvis and internal organs such as kidneys.

It can be hard to know if you have PAD. Many people with PAD have little or no symptoms. Others have pain in their legs while they're physically active. The pain usually goes away when they rest.

- Smoking
- History of diabetes
- Abnormal blood lipid levels
- High blood pressure

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptom of lower-extremity PAD is muscle cramping in the buttocks, hip, thigh, calf or foot, singly or in combination, while walking, climbing stairs or exercising. This usually goes away when the activity stops. It's called intermittent claudication.

Severe symptoms include:

- Leg pain that doesn't go away when you stop exercising
- Foot or toe wounds that won't heal or heal very slowly

- Gangrene, or dead tissue
- A marked decrease in the temperature of a lower leg or foot, compared to the other leg or the rest of the body
- Poor nail growth on the toes or hair growth on the legs

How is PAD diagnosed?

PAD diagnosis begins with a medical history and physical exam. Your health care professional will also ask about your symptoms and check the pulses in your legs.

Your physical exam will include a simple test called the ankle-brachial index (ABI). It compares the blood pressure in your ankle to the blood pressure in your arm. A normal ABI is 1 to 1.4. A value less than or equal to 0.90 is considered abnormal, and, in severe disease, it's less than 0.5. If your ABI results are normal or borderline (.91 to .99), an exercise treadmill ABI may be done. If your ABI is greater than 1.4, a toe-brachial index (TBI) test also may be done.

If your ABI is abnormal or you have claudication, other tests may be needed.

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