

Health Awareness



Don't Risk Life And Limb: Know The Signs Of Peripheral Artery Disease

(NAPSA)—Many people dismiss leg pain as a normal sign of aging. But for 8.5 million Americans, the cause of their pain can be a life- or limb-threatening condition called peripheral artery disease (PAD). Everyone, especially those at highest risk, should know the signs of PAD and know how to prevent and treat it. With new drugs on the horizon, health plan coverage for exercise therapy, improvements in procedures to treat advanced disease, and new treatment guidelines for health care providers, there are now more tools than ever to combat this disease. Unfortunately, the disease often goes undetected and untreated although it's more common than atrial fibrillation and heart failure.

What is PAD?

PAD happens when fatty deposits build up in arteries in the legs and feet. The condition is often undiagnosed, yet ignoring the signs of PAD is dangerous. Not only does it increase your risk for heart attack and stroke, these blockages can restrict circulation to the legs and feet. Left untreated, PAD can end in amputation. Cigarette smokers have the highest risk—so high, in fact, that PAD screening should be routine in smokers. People with diabetes and those with cardiovascular risk factors such as high blood pressure, obesity or physical inactivity are also at risk.

What can I do about it?

Simple measures can catch PAD before it's too late. You can manage or reverse it with proper care. If you have risk factors, take your socks off at the doctor's office. Your socks and shoes cover up many of the signs of this crippling disease:

- **Leg pain:** The most common symptom of peripheral artery disease in the legs is painful muscle cramping in the hips, thighs or calves when walking, climbing stairs or exercising. The pain often goes away after a few minutes of resting. This type of pain is called intermittent claudication. Thanks to a recent ruling, it's easier for people to keep PAD from



Pain in your legs and feet could be a sign of a serious condition. Talk to your doctor about peripheral artery disease (PAD).

getting worse. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services now covers supervised exercise therapy for people with intermittent claudication. You may be eligible for up to 36 sessions during a 12-week period with an optional second round of treatment. Ask your doctor if this therapy is available to you.

- **Skin problems or discoloration on your legs and feet:** Be aware of redness or other color changes in the skin on your legs and feet. Temperature changes may also be noticeable—your feet will feel cooler than other parts of your leg.
- **Leg or foot wounds that are slow to heal:** If cuts or other wounds on your feet or toes aren't improving after a couple of weeks, you should ask about PAD.
- **Poor nail growth:** Slow-growing or thickened toenails can be a sign of reduced blood flow to the legs and feet.

Even if you aren't having symptoms, if you have risk factors, you should be screened regularly. Early detection and treatment are key. Speak to your doctor about any problems you're having with your legs and feet.

Learn More

For more information about PAD management, visit the American Heart Association at www.heart.org/PAD.