

Taking Care of Your Legs, Inside and Out

(NAPSA)—Rita Smith, 57, had enjoyed an active lifestyle that included aerobics and dog walking, but had to stop when these activities caused pain in her lower legs. She also noticed the bottoms of her feet turned white after being active. Smith lived with the pain and uncertainty for three years. When she decided to seek medical attention, her diagnosis was peripheral arterial disease (P.A.D.).

Between 8 and 12 million Americans over the age of 50 (or one in 20 adults) have P.A.D., a disease that occurs when arteries—particularly in the lower legs—become clogged with fatty deposits that limit blood flow. P.A.D. increases your risk of heart attack and stroke, but timely detection and treatment can reduce these risks and improve your quality of life. Your risk for P.A.D. is increased if you: smoke or used to smoke; have diabetes; have high blood pressure; have high blood cholesterol; have a history of vascular disease, heart attack, or stroke; or are African American.

In an effort to raise awareness about P.A.D., the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI)—part of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services—in cooperation with the P.A.D. Coalition, is launching the Stay in Circulation campaign.

“P.A.D. is not an inevitable consequence of aging,” says Elizabeth G. Nabel, M.D., NHLBI director. “Early detection and treatment of P.A.D. are important for staying in circulation and preserving or restoring mobility.”

The typical symptoms of P.A.D. include:

- Fatigue, heaviness, and cramping in the legs during activities such as walking or



Peripheral arterial disease affects between 8 and 12 million men and women over the age of 50.

climbing stairs that goes away with rest;

- Pain in legs and/or feet at rest, disturbing sleep;

- Sores or wounds on toes, feet, or legs that heal slowly, poorly, or not at all;

- Color changes in the skin of the feet, including paleness or blueness;

- A lower temperature in one leg compared to the other leg;

- Poor nail growth and decreased hair growth on toes and legs.

Although Smith had defined symptoms, most people with P.A.D. do not experience pain or other noticeable symptoms. A simple, painless test called an ankle-brachial index (ABI) can help diagnose P.A.D.

“I now understand that P.A.D. is treatable. My life has changed, but I’m adapting,” Smith said. “With my treatment, I now walk for 30 minutes a day with my dog and do yoga twice a week.”

If you are over the age of 50 and have any risk factors associated with P.A.D., consult your health care provider. For more information about P.A.D., visit www.aboutpad.org.