

PERIPHERAL VASCULAR DISEASE

BY SR ANNETTE ANDERSON (M.CUR)

Peripheral vascular disease (PWD / PAD) is when there is reduced blood supply to a part of the body. This is common in the lower legs but can also happen in the upper limbs. This is caused by an accumulation of plaque (fats and cholesterol) in the arteries found in your legs or arms. This causes a narrowing or blockage of the artery which takes blood from your heart to the distal parts of your body. This prevents oxygenated blood from getting through to the tissues, causing them to die resulting in gangrene. This commonly occurs in your toes and feet first; however, this is occurring throughout your body increasing your risks of stroke and heart attacks.

PVD generally takes time to progress, which is why a healthy lifestyle and exercise throughout your life is so important. However, it is never too late to start improving your lifestyle by exercising, eating less fat and giving up products containing nicotine ([how to stop smoking](#)).

The different stages of peripheral vascular disease include

- stage 1- which is asymptomatic (without symptoms).
- stage 2a - which includes mild claudication (leg pain during exercise)
- stage 2b - moderate to severe claudication
- stage 3 - Ischemic rest pain (pain in your legs when you're at rest)
- stage 4 - Ulcers or gangrene which result in amputations.

It is therefore very important to come and see a vascular surgeon as soon as you realise that you have leg pain during exercise, as vascular disease caught early, can prevent amputations.

Unfortunately, diabetic patients often don't experience claudication or rest pain like other patients, which may result in a late presentation. They may only realize there is a problem when they find a burning or aching pain in their feet and toes while resting, especially at night while lying flat. Cool skin on their feet with redness or other colour changes of the skin. They also find skin and soft tissue infections of the feet or legs that frequently result in sores that don't heal.

Vascular disease can be treated with medications, lifestyle changes and possible surgical intervention. The sooner the presentation to a vascular surgeon and a commitment to improve their lifestyle with exercise and diet, the better the prognosis.

Examples of peripheral vascular diseases include

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The following illustration was published by the American Heart Association and gives interesting facts about peripheral vascular disease.

PAD AWARENESS

Know the risks and the effects of non-healing wounds.

Peripheral Artery Disease (PAD) is a condition caused by a blockage in the arteries to the legs. Claudication may decrease the distance of walking and daily activities. PAD increases the risk of developing non-healing wounds on the legs or feet. Risk factors include diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and smoking.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS	STATISTICS	TREATMENT
• Pain or cramps in the back of the leg	• Nearly 8 million adults over 40 may have PAD	• Advanced screening and diagnostic testing, medication or procedures to increase blood flow.
• A pale or bluish skin color	• 1 in 5 people over age 60 have PAD	• Advanced dressings and therapies
• Numbness or tingling in the feet and legs	• 40% of those living with PAD may not experience symptoms or leg pain	• Specialized boots or pumps to help with blood flow circulation
• Shiny skin, with loss of hair on legs	• 25% of people with late-stage PAD may require an amputation within one year	
• Sores or wounds on the toes, legs, or feet that do not heal		

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