AFRICAN AMERICANS AND  
PERIPHERAL ARTERY DISEASE  
(PAD)

This booklet provides  
information regarding  
symptoms, prevention,  
and next steps.
When walking, climbing stairs, or working out, do you ever have cramps in your hips, thighs, or calves? Do you have wounds on your feet or toes that won’t heal or are taking a long time to heal? **If you said yes, you should talk to a doctor about your symptoms** because they could be signs of Peripheral Artery Disease (PAD).¹

PAD is a disease that causes the arteries in the body to become clogged or narrow, causing less blood flow to the legs and feet. Atherosclerosis (ath·er·o·scle·ro·sis) develops when plaque (fatty deposits) builds up in the arteries.² The blockage of your arteries can take place throughout the body, including in the heart, brain, legs, pelvis, and kidneys.

**Getting informed** about symptoms, prevention measures, and next steps can save your legs.
Up to **12 million people** in the US are estimated to have PAD, and **many cases go undetected.**³⁴ PAD often impacts the legs, and the risk of developing PAD increases with **age** in both men and women.⁵

Unfortunately, when compared to other racial and ethnic groups, **Black and African Americans** experience a **higher frequency of illness** as well as **lower rates of access to preventative care.**⁶

**Black Americans** are also **twice as likely** to have PAD and are **more likely to lose a limb because of it.**⁵ **Amputation of a limb** can often be postponed or avoided when treatment is provided right away and is specific to your symptoms.¹
THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CAD & PAD

You are more likely to develop PAD if you already have coronary artery disease (CAD). Likewise, if you have PAD, you are also more likely to develop CAD. The buildup of fatty deposits in the arteries, atherosclerosis, is the primary cause of both PAD and CAD.⁷

THE FOLLOWING FACTORS CAN INCREASE YOUR RISK OF DEVELOPING PAD:⁷

- Have a history of smoking
- Have high cholesterol
- Being obese
- Suffer from Type 2 diabetes
- Have high blood pressure
- Being physically inactive
- Family history
- Increased age
- Chronic kidney disease
Your **medical and family history** are **important to your care**. If there is a **significant history of chronic kidney disease** in your family, some medical professionals could evaluate you earlier.  

**Early detection** is key for **effective disease management and treatment**.
THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING YOUR RISKS

Your health is important. If something doesn’t feel right, visiting your doctor is the first step to determining your next course of action.

[✓] PAD can be treated, and there are ways to reduce the likelihood of developing it. The sooner you consult a doctor, the greater your chances are of saving your leg.

[✓] If treatment is delayed for an excessive amount of time, amputation may be unavoidable. However, reducing the progression of gangrene (dead tissue) is possible if treatment is started early enough.
The severity of PAD symptoms and how they appear can be very different from person to person. It’s possible that you can have PAD and not show any symptoms or confuse PAD symptoms with those of another condition. A common symptom of PAD in the legs is painful cramping in the hips, thighs, or calves when walking, climbing stairs, or doing other types of physical activity. That is why visiting your doctor for regular checkups is so important.

**SEVERE PAD SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS MAY INCLUDE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING**:

- **Leg pain** that doesn’t go away when you stop exercising
- Become affected with *gangrene*, or dead tissue
- A leg or foot with a lower temperature than the opposite leg or rest of body.
- Foot or toe wounds that won’t heal or heal very slowly
- Poor nail growth on the toes or hair growth on the legs
- You may have PAD and not experience any symptoms
KNOW YOUR RISK

[✓] **Schedule a checkup** with your **healthcare provider** to discuss your signs and symptoms.⁹

[✓] **Make an appointment** for a **physical examination**, since this is the first step in identifying PAD. **Be sure to take off your shoes and socks** and ask your doctor to **examine your feet** and feel for your pulses at your next medical appointment.⁹

[✓] A simple, **noninvasive test** called an **ankle-brachial index (ABI)** can be performed by **your doctor to check for poor circulation** by **comparing the blood pressure** in your arms and legs.⁹
Early detection is key to reducing your risk of amputation (loss of toe, foot, or leg) and improving your chances of saving your leg. The appropriate treatment can prevent or delay the need for amputation.¹

Sometimes, no matter how hard doctors try to save a patient’s limb, amputation is the only option. After an amputation, daily life becomes more difficult for amputees, making it harder for them to participate in social activities, and it becomes physically demanding to get around.⁹
The physical environment in which you live, learn, work, play, and worship has an impact on your quality of life and health. Economic and societal factors can also influence your health.\textsuperscript{11}

[✓] Black Americans are up to \textbf{4x} more likely to undergo amputation than White Americans.\textsuperscript{12}

[✓] \textbf{71\%} of individuals who have undergone amputation will pass away within three years.\textsuperscript{13}

[✓] \textbf{Black women} with PAD are \textbf{7.6x} more likely than other women to have an amputation.\textsuperscript{14}
If you have Type 2 diabetes, you are at a higher risk of experiencing negative outcomes from PAD. African Americans have a higher risk of developing diabetes. Working with your health care provider to develop a strategy that includes glucose management can be beneficial to diabetic patients.

DIABETES MANAGEMENT:

- Healthy diet to reduce your cholesterol and manage diabetes
- Reaching and maintaining a healthy weight
- Managing other cardiovascular risk factors
- Foot care and ulcer prevention
HOW IS PAD TREATED?

When treating peripheral artery disease, the goal of treatment is to both reduce the symptoms of the condition and stop it from getting worse. Changing your lifestyle and engaging in regular exercise can slow the progression of PAD symptoms. There are drugs that have been shown to reduce symptoms associated with leg pain.

CHANGES YOU CAN MAKE TO YOUR LIFESTYLE TO LOWER YOUR RISK INCLUDE 14:

- Stopping smoking
- Managing Type 2 diabetes and blood sugar levels
- Controlling blood pressure
- Being physically active (including a supervised exercise program)
- Eating a heart-healthy diet low in saturated and trans fats
Unfortunately, for some people with PAD, changing their lifestyle, getting more exercise, and taking medications just isn’t enough. If you have PAD, you might require surgery or a minimally invasive procedure. Choosing the optimal course of treatment for you will involve discussing your options with a healthcare provider.  

MEDICATIONS THAT YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER MAY PRESCRIBE INCLUDE:  

[✓] High blood pressure medicine  

[✓] Medicines that reduce cholesterol, such as statins  

[✓] Medications to treat claudication (leg pain)  

[✓] Antithrombotic agents (eg. antiplatelet and anticoagulant)
If you **have questions** about peripheral artery disease (PAD), preventing amputation, or maintaining your leg and foot health, speak to your **doctor** and **get screened for PAD**.

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**REFERENCES**

   https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/peripheral-artery-disease/about-peripheral-artery-disease-pad

   https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/cholesterol/about-cholesterol/atherosclerosis


   https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/peripheral-artery-disease/understand-your-risk-for-pad/are-you-at-risk-for-pad-infographic


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