

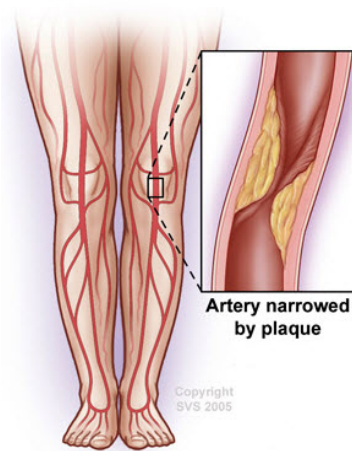
“My Legs Hurt When I Walk”

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Leg pain may be caused by hardening of the arteries. To expand a bit on a term that you may have heard recently in the media, it is PAD or peripheral arterial disease.



This disease involves blockage of arteries especially in the lower extremities. Often, when lower extremity arteries are blocked, the patient will have no complaint.

However, as the disease progresses, the patient will start to have pain in the lower extremity upon walking; this type of pain is called “claudication.” This particular pain is sometimes confused with pain that may be caused by other diseases; such diseases include: a pinched nerve, a problem with the veins, or orthopedic problems.

While all of these can be quite disabling, they are usually not life or limb threatening. However, PAD was shown to be associated with coronary artery disease that may lead to heart attack and with disease in the brain circulation that may lead to stroke. Therefore, identification of blockages in the arteries of the leg can be important as treatment can be initiated early to prevent a heart attack or stroke.

People with leg pain upon walking should not dismiss it as a "normal process of aging." They should discuss it with their doctor. Early diagnosis and treatment of PAD is important not only to preserve the health of legs but also to decrease the risk of heart disease, stroke and other health problems.

The most common cause of PAD or arterial blockage is atherosclerosis or plaque build-up in the artery. This most commonly occurs in the elderly, diabetics, smokers and people with high cholesterol or high blood pressure. Patients with blockage of the arteries sometimes will have

pain in the thigh, buttock, or calf upon walking. Usually, this pain will be relieved when the patient stops walking to resume again as the patient walks again and to the same distance.

These blockages can take years to develop and the symptoms may be gradual in onset. Some people may feel a tightness, heaviness, cramping or weakness in their leg with activity. The pain often occurs more quickly if the person walks uphill or climbs a flight of stairs.

The medical professional who usually deals with this disease in conjunction with a primary care physician is a vascular surgeon. People who have leg pain when walking should discuss it with their doctor and consider seeing a vascular surgeon to help find the cause to get the appropriate treatment.

Most often, treatment of this condition is done by controlling the risk factors for PAD; namely, smoking cessation, controlling high blood pressure and diabetes and lowering cholesterol. Also, there are medications that can help in improving the condition that can be prescribed alongside walking exercise that encourages the formation of secondary circulation to channel the blood around the area of the blockage. This can be effective 50 to 70 percent of the time.

If these measures are not effective, and especially if this condition deteriorates, a procedure may be needed. Such procedure can be as simple as inserting a balloon to dilate the narrowing in the artery or more complex using a bypass operation. The vascular surgeon offers all above management methods: medical management, catheter-based techniques and bypass surgery.

To learn more about your vascular health and find a vascular surgeon visit VascularWeb.org.