

Peripheral arterial disease

(Poor blood supply)

Information sheet

What is it?

Peripheral arterial disease (PAD) is the narrowing of one or more arteries (blood vessels). It affects arteries that take blood to the legs, reducing the oxygen that gets to the foot that helps keep the tissues healthy.

Also known as 'peripheral vascular disease' and sometimes called 'hardening of the arteries'.

What causes it?

The narrowing of the arteries is caused by atheroma. Atheroma is like fatty patches or 'plaques' that develop inside the lining of arteries. A patch of atheroma starts quite small, and causes no problems at first. Over the years it can thicken up and start to affect the blood flow through the arteries. (It is a bit like limescale that forms on the inside of water pipes).

What are the symptoms?

The typical symptom is like a 'cramping' sensation in the calves when walking a short distance. It is called 'intermittent claudication'. The pain is relieved when you stop walking. In more serious cases, cramp can be felt in the calf muscles during rest and at night.

How can I help prevent it?

The best way to help prevent this is to:

Stop smoking

Exercise regularly

Maintain a healthy weight

Eat a healthy diet

Limit the amount of alcohol you drink (Contact your practice nurse for any further advice on the above)

Take care of your feet

How do I take care of my feet?

Try not to injure your feet as this can lead to an ulcer or infection developing more easily if the blood supply to the feet is reduced. Do not wear tight shoes or socks which may reduce blood supply. Tell your Podiatrist if you have any foot injury, pain in a foot when you are resting, or any marked change in skin colour or temperature in either of your feet.

What can I expect during an assessment?

Your Podiatrist will listen to the blood flow in your feet and complete a full foot check.

If you have been assessed and found to have significantly poor circulation or are experiencing painful symptoms, you may be referred for further tests and treatment with a vascular specialist with your consent.

What Vascular treatments are available?

There are three main types of treatment that may be appropriate to improve the blood flow to your feet. These are:

- **Angioplasty** - a tiny 'balloon' is inserted into the artery and 'blown up' at the section that is narrowed. This widens the affected segment of artery. This is only suitable if a short segment of artery is narrowed.
- **Bypass surgery**- a graft (like a flexible pipe) is connected to the artery above and below a narrowed section. The blood is then diverted around the narrowed section.
- **Amputation** - of a toe, foot, or lower leg, is needed in a small number of cases. It is needed when severe PAD develops and a foot becomes gangrenous due to a very poor blood supply.

SOS Advice

If you notice a problem with your feet, **don't** ignore it; seek advice straight away.

The signs that should cause concern and may be an indication of infection are:

- Any new ulcers, wounds or blistered areas on your feet
- Your foot becoming noticeably hotter than normal
- Any colour change – red or blue or bruising
- Any new areas of swelling on your feet
- Any discharge coming through the dressing where previously it was dry
- Any new pain or throbbing sensation
- Your foot developing an unpleasant odour
- Feeling feverish or unwell may also indicate the presence of infection.

Contact us

Oxleas Adults Community Greenwich Podiatry Service

0208 320 3550

Monday – Friday

8:30am – 4:30pm

It is not always possible for us to answer the phone straight away.

Please leave a message and your call will be returned.

Please let us know if you require an interpreter or have any additional needs.