

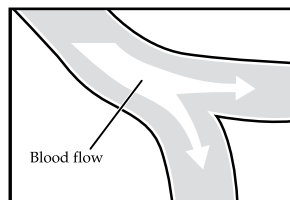
# Vascular Disease

## Types of Vascular Disease

Vascular disease is a term for a wide range of diseases that affect the vascular, or blood vessel, systems of your body.

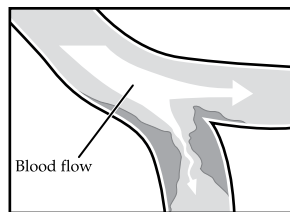
The diseases are known by many different names, such as peripheral arterial disease, atherosclerosis or claudication. You may have even heard these conditions referred to as “clogged” pipes or poor circulation. All of these terms refer to the ways in which your arteries or veins may not be working as well as they once did.

- Arteries transport oxygen in the blood from your heart to the rest of your body. When your heart beats, arteries are able to expand slightly. When the heart is between beats, the arteries contract. This helps the oxygen move more efficiently to the organs.



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**In an artery free of plaque (fatty deposits), blood flows freely.**



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**In an artery with plaque (fatty deposits), blood cannot flow freely. This is called peripheral artery disease (PAD).**

- Veins carry blood without oxygen from your body back to your heart, to start the process of delivering oxygen-rich blood thru your body. Veins are not as flexible as arteries. They have valves that open and close as blood flows through the vessel system.

## Causes of Vascular Disease

It is often difficult to find the exact cause of vascular disease because many of the conditions are connected. It can be hard to tell what is a cause and what is a symptom.

In general, vascular disease is caused by atherosclerosis. Fatty deposits, called plaque, collect on the inside of the artery and reduce the smooth flow of blood through the vessel. This may result in a lack of oxygen-rich blood being delivered throughout the body. Vascular disease can cause serious problems.

## Risk Factors for Vascular Disease

- smoking or tobacco use
- age
- family history of heart or blood vessel disease
- high blood pressure (hypertension)
- diabetes
- high cholesterol
- obesity
- lack of exercise

(over)

## Symptoms of Vascular Disease

- an aching, cramping, tired feeling or numbness, tingling or pain in your feet, toes, legs or buttocks after walking (The pain goes away after a few minutes.)
- leg pain during the night or during rest that goes away if you hang your leg over the edge of your bed or put your leg up on a footstool
- blue or red discoloration of your foot or leg when sitting or standing
- a wound or sore on your foot that does not heal
- cold feet and cold or numb calves
- dry and scaly feet and legs
- less hair growth on your legs
- no pulse in your foot
- impotence (in men).

Some people may not have symptoms.

## Tests Used to Find Vascular Disease

- **Ankle-Brachial Index (ABI).** This test tells how well blood is flowing through the arteries of your legs. Blood pressure readings will be taken from your arms and legs. A doppler probe (the size of a large pen) will be used to listen to your blood pressure.

If the pressure is different between your arms and legs, you may have vascular disease in one or both legs.

- **Ultrasound.** Sound waves are bounced off your arteries to produce an image of the vessel that shows its size and shape, as well as any blockage.
- **Magnetic resonance angiography (MRA).** This test is a kind of X-ray that will take a picture of the blood vessels in your body.
- **Computed tomography angiography (CTA).** This special X-ray uses a computer to show the flow of blood through your body's blood vessels.
- **Angiography and venogram.** Contrast is injected into arteries or veins of your lower body. This X-ray shows how blood is flowing, and gives detailed pictures of narrowed or blocked arteries and veins. (You may feel a warm or burning sensation as the contrast is injected.)

## How to Prevent Vascular Disease

Finding vascular disease early, making lifestyle changes and treating your symptoms will improve your symptoms and slow the progress of the disease. Ask your health care provider for ways to prevent vascular diseases.