

How You Can Improve Your Vascular Health

General Information

You can slow down the progress of peripheral arterial disease (PAD) by changing basic lifestyle habits, exercising and decreasing your risk factors.

Improving Your Circulation

- ❑ Do not use tobacco. This includes pipes, cigars, cigarettes and chewing tobacco. Do not use e-cigarettes. Smoking is the most important risk factor for PAD.
- ❑ Eat a diet low in cholesterol and saturated fat to reduce your risk of atherosclerosis. This is the process of plaque buildup in your arteries. The plaque slows or stops blood flow to and from your blood vessels.
- ❑ Join a walking program to improve the circulation to your legs and promote growth of new blood vessels. Ask your health care provider for advice.
- ❑ Lose weight if you are overweight. For every pound of fat, your heart needs to pump blood through an extra mile's worth of blood vessels.
- ❑ Watch your blood pressure. If you have high blood pressure (hypertension) you are at an increased risk of heart attack, stroke, heart failure or kidney damage. Your blood pressure should be less than 120 and less than 80. If you have diabetes your blood pressure should be less than 139/89. If you have high blood pressure, talk with your health care provider.

- ❑ If you have diabetes, work to keep your blood glucose in good control. People with diabetes are at a greater risk for PAD because of the damage the disease can do to blood vessels. Check with your health care provider if you are having problems with your diabetes.

Taking Good Care of Your Feet

- ❑ Check your feet every day for cuts, blisters, red spots, sores, cracks and swelling. Use a mirror to check the bottoms of your feet or ask a family member for help if you have trouble seeing.
- ❑ **Call your health care provider right away if a cut, sore, blister or bruise does not heal after several days.** Your health care provider may apply a special dressing to help the wound heal and protect it from infection. You may also receive antibiotics (medicine) to fight an infection.
- ❑ Wash your feet with mild soap and slightly warm water every day. Do not soak your feet because they may dry out.
- ❑ Dry your feet well. Be sure to dry between the toes.
- ❑ Use a thin coat of lotion and cream for dry skin, but not between your toes. Avoid lotions with perfumes.
- ❑ Use a pumice stone to smooth corns and calluses.
- ❑ Cut your toenails straight across and file the edges with an emery board or nail file.

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- ❑ Wear shoes and socks at all times:
 - Never walk barefoot.
 - Wear comfortable shoes that fit well and protect your feet.
 - Wear shoes at the beach or on hot pavement.
 - Wear socks at night if your feet get cold.
- ❑ Always check inside your shoes for worn areas or things that might cause sores on your feet. Ask your health care provider about special shoes.
- ❑ Avoid crossing your legs for long periods of time. Instead, cross your legs at the ankles.
- ❑ Wiggle your toes and move your ankles up and down for 5 minutes, 2 or 3 times each day.