

Peripheral arterial disease: diagnosis and management

Information for the public

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Peripheral arterial disease: the care you should expect

Peripheral arterial disease happens when the blood vessels carrying blood to the legs and feet become narrowed or blocked. It becomes more common with age, affecting about 1 in 5 people aged over 60 at least mildly. The most common symptom is leg pain when walking which improves on resting, but some people have no symptoms at all. Even if you are symptom-free, having peripheral arterial disease means you are also more likely to develop heart disease or stroke. It can also eventually lead to serious complications like losing a limb, so taking action as early as possible is important.

We want this guideline to make a difference to people with peripheral arterial disease by making sure:

- doctors recognise signs of peripheral arterial disease and know which tests to use – especially for people with diabetes who are more likely to develop the condition
- your doctor explains the changes you can make yourself to improve your symptoms – like exercising, giving up smoking, eating a healthy diet and making sure you have good control of your diabetes, if you have it
- you are given advice about the best treatments to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke and, if your symptoms are severe, to improve the blood flow to your legs.

Making decisions together

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your healthcare professionals should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns.

To help you make decisions, think about:

- What matters most to you – what do you want to get out of treatment?
- What are you most worried about – are there risks or downsides to treatments that worry you more than others?
- What support and information do you need to help you make changes to your lifestyle?

If you can't understand the information you are given, tell your [health] professional.

Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

Where can I find out more?

[NHS Choices](#) has more information about peripheral arterial disease.

Find your nearest local [Healthwatch](#).

The organisations below can give you more advice and support.

- [Action on Smoking and Health](#) (ASH)
- [Diabetes UK](#), 0345 123 2399
- [HEART UK](#) – the Cholesterol Charity, 0845 450 5988
- [South Asian Health Foundation](#), 0203 313 067
- [The Circulation Foundation](#), 0207 304 4779

NICE is not responsible for the content of these websites.

We wrote this guideline with people who have been affected by peripheral arterial disease and staff who treat and support them. All the decisions are based on the best research available.

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Accreditation

