

Peripheral Artery Disease, Bypass Surgery & Angioplasty

Peripheral artery disease (PAD) is a condition in which the arteries do not carry enough blood from the heart to the legs. This is due to a thickening of arteries when plaque (a fatlike substance) builds up. The arteries gradually get narrower. If not treated, the arteries may become completely blocked.

Symptoms include the inability to walk more than short distances, leg cramps when walking, and muscle fatigue. It may even progress to pain in the leg, foot, toes or heel while resting. It often occurs in both legs.

Risk factors include smoking, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, lack of exercise, and advancing age.

After evaluation, a doctor creates a customized treatment plan. Sometimes PAD can be controlled by lifestyle changes alone. If surgery is needed, there are various types:

- **Angioplasty** involves using a balloon to open an artery.
- **Stenting** involves inserting a tiny wire mesh tube to hold an artery open.
- **Bypass surgery** involves attaching a graft to the blocked artery. This reroutes the blood around the blockage. Grafts can be a piece of vein from the patient's own body, or they can be manmade (synthetic). The site and type of blockage determines the type of bypass surgery needed.

Stopping smoking, control of blood pressure, exercise, and healthy eating habits can reduce the risk of PAD before it develops.

There are simple tests that a doctor uses to determine the likelihood of PAD. People with risk factors should talk to their doctors about it. If they have symptoms, they should see a doctor to assess and evaluate this disease.