



Find out more

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(Monday-Friday 9am-5pm)



Peripheral Vascular Disease (PVD)

Information for patients

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Introduction

Peripheral Vascular Disease describes a condition in which the circulation to your legs and feet is reduced.

Fatty deposits can build up and narrow the blood vessels in your legs. Less blood can flow through the vessels. When this happens cells do not receive the needed oxygen and nutrients for healing.

Poor circulation may cause the skin on feet and legs to become thin and very dry. Hair may disappear. The foot may feel cold and look bluish.

Poor circulation also makes the skin on your legs and feet more likely to develop injuries and infections which may lead to ulceration. Wound healing may be impaired in these areas.

Pain

If you get pain in the calf muscles in your legs, it could be a sign of clogged arteries. A decrease in blood flow to the muscles means that they don't receive enough oxygen and sugar to work efficiently. Waste products then build up during exercise that is irritating to the muscles. The result is cramping pain (or claudication).

Sometimes, the pain can be present when you are resting, particularly at night.

Testing for poor circulation

The pulses in your feet, and possibly behind the knee will be checked. This helps determine the degree of blockage in your legs. It may be necessary to take the blood pressure in your legs and compare it with your arm to assess the degree of damage. You will also be asked about any pain in your legs.

Treatment

Preventive lifestyle changes are necessary to stop the progression of leg circulation problems. The healthy lifestyle choices to prevent poor circulation are the same as those suggested to prevent heart disease. They include regular exercise, a healthy balanced diet, good diabetes control, reducing blood pressure and cholesterol, and quitting smoking.

If your circulation is found to be impaired, you will be referred to the vascular team – experts in assessing your circulation and the health of your blood vessels. They may refer you for specialist imaging that clearly shows your blood vessels. If you are found to be suitable, they may offer procedures to improve the circulation to your legs and feet. These can include widening the artery with a small catheter, or surgery to bypass diseased sections of artery. The goal of any procedure is to re-establish the blood supply to the legs, feet and toes.

The team will also address any pain you may have, and offer pain relief medication to ensure that you are comfortable.

Footcare

It is important to look after your feet carefully if you have reduced circulation.

If you smoke, it is VITAL to stop smoking. Smoking puts you at serious risk of foot disease, and in the worst case scenario, amputation.

Your footcare team can refer you to 'stop smoking' experts, who will support you and help you to quit. Just ask, or contact the Smokefree Norfolk on 0800 085 4113.