



FootScope

A foot health message from
Bayswater Allied Health

HEALTHY FEET AND A HEALTHY HEART



Eating foods high in saturated fats, smoking and a sedentary lifestyle can all lead to the narrowing of the arteries and blood vessels leading to the heart. This in turn leads to a build up of fatty deposits in those arteries, which can lead to serious problems including heart attack and stroke. A common side effect and often a precursor to heart attack or stroke is an identical narrowing of the arteries to the legs and feet, known in medical terms as peripheral arterial disease. More than one in ten adults suffer from peripheral arterial disease and, left untreated, the condition can have serious effects on the feet including increased risk of amputation as well as increased risk of death.

Diagnosis of problems with the feet can prevent heart disease and the risk of serious problems to the feet, yet peripheral arterial disease is often undiagnosed. People in high-risk categories for developing peripheral arterial disease include smokers; diabetics; people suffering from obesity; a family history of peripheral arterial disease, heart disease and stroke; high blood pressure; high cholesterol; and being older than 50 years of age. If you are at increased risk of peripheral arterial disease it is important to see a podiatrist for a check-up, as catching the problem early can be both limb and life-saving.

Leading a healthy lifestyle and taking care of your feet is the best way to avoid disease. Eat a varied diet low in saturated fats, exercise regularly and avoid tobacco. These steps alone will lower the build up of fatty deposits in the arteries, increase the flow of oxygen to your feet, and reduce the risks from narrowed arteries caused by smoking. Take care of your feet by washing them daily in warm soapy water, and check for any sores or symptoms of disease.

SYMPTOMS OF HEART-RELATED FOOT PROBLEMS

Diagnosis of problems with the feet can prevent heart disease and the risk of serious problems to the feet, including amputation. Yet peripheral arterial disease is often undiagnosed. If you have any of the symptoms of peripheral arterial disease it is important to make an appointment with a podiatrist or another medical professional as soon as possible. The main symptoms are described below:

- 1. Loss of sensation:** with peripheral arterial disease it is common to experience numbness or weakness in the lower leg.
- 2. Cramps:** the muscles of the calf, thigh and hip areas may cramp, which can be very painful. Cramping is more common after exercise as the blood is trying harder to pump through the arteries.
- 3. Cold feet or legs:** if you struggle to warm your feet or legs and find that they are always colder than the rest of your body, this is an indication that your circulation is restricted. This is particularly worrying for heart health if one leg is obviously colder than the other.

4. Persistent wounds: sores on the legs, feet or toes that fail to heal indicate peripheral arterial disease. Wounds that fail to heal are a sign that blood isn't circulating well enough to promote new cell growth.

5. Colour differences: If part of the feet or legs changes colour this could be an indication that blood flow is reduced to those areas.

6. Slow growth of hair and nails: less hair than usual and slow-growing toenails are both symptoms of peripheral arterial disease.

7. Skin changes: shiny skin on the legs is a symptom of peripheral arterial disease.

8. Weak pulse: the absence of a pulse or a very weak pulse in the toes, feet or legs indicates that blood flow is definitely restricted.

9. Erectile dysfunction: in men, erectile dysfunction can indicate peripheral arterial disease as this condition is associated with reduced blood flow.

TOP FIVE TIPS TO AVOID HEART-RELATED FOOT PROBLEMS

Most diseases are avoidable by leading a healthy lifestyle, and in the case of peripheral arterial disease lifestyle changes can be the key to saving a leg or escaping premature death. Listed below are the five main points that can be controlled without medical intervention to prevent serious foot problems including painful cramps, wounds that fail to heal and amputation, as well as the prevention of heart attack and stroke.

1. Quit smoking: smoking narrows the arteries, making it more difficult for the blood to circulate to the feet and legs. Quitting can both prevent disease and make existing disease easier to fight.

2. Maintain blood glucose levels: diabetics should keep blood glucose levels under control.

3. Get your BMI down: exercise regularly and keep your body mass index (BMI) below 30. Obesity is a serious risk factor for peripheral arterial disease and keeping the weight off will go a long way towards preventing disease.

4. Normalise blood pressure: avoid triggers that make your blood pressure high, whether they be dietary, stress or other. High blood pressure increases the risk for both heart disease and peripheral arterial disease.

5. Lower cholesterol levels: high cholesterol increases the chances that fatty deposits will collect in narrowed arteries, making arteries even narrower and reducing the flow of blood to the legs and feet.



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