

## **Peripheral Arterial Disease Patient Education**

PAD (Peripheral Arterial Disease) is a narrowing of the arteries that bring blood flow to the legs and feet. In late stages, it can be very serious resulting in non-healing wounds, painful sleep and walking, and even gangrene requiring amputation and early death. Some patients are at higher risk from family history, previous history of heart disease and/or diabetes, and smoking poses a significant risk.

In early stages, the patient feels no symptoms, but a careful medical professional can pick up the early signs by detecting decreased pulses and changes in the skin, hair, and nails. In early stages, treatment consists of a walking/exercise program (45 minutes per day, 6 days a week) and careful control of diabetes, cholesterol, heart disease, and smoking cessation.

In later stages, the decreased blood flow causes symptoms such as cramping/burning in the feet and legs, often on one side only, during exercise or sleep. These patients may also have poor wound healing in their feet or ankles and should not have surgery because of poor wound healing. These patients require advanced testing such as angiogram with treatments such as balloon angioplasty and stent placement. Some patients have such advanced disease that they require bypass of blocked arteries or amputation of the dying limb.

PAD is a very serious condition and requires a dedicated patient-doctor relationship to reverse the process and maintain blood flow. Once a patient has PAD, without treatment, they will progressively worsen until serious consequences develop. Needless to say, smoking causes significant worsening of PAD and must be stopped at all costs if successful treatment is expected.