



The Dudley Group
NHS Foundation Trust

Arterial disorders of the lower leg explained

Leg Ulcer Management Team
Patient Information Leaflet

Introduction

This leaflet is for people who have a problem with the circulation of blood in their lower leg arteries. This is known as an arterial disorder.

This leaflet gives you more information about what arteries do, what happens when they do not work properly and what you can do to help yourself.

What do arteries do?

Arteries carry blood that is rich in oxygen and nutrients to your legs. This is needed to keep your skin and muscles in good condition. Blood flow through the arteries is moved by the pumping action of the heart.

Once the arteries have delivered the oxygen and nutrients to the tissue in your legs, the blood has to be transported back to the heart. It is transported back through veins.

When arteries are healthy, they are elastic and smooth inside, allowing blood to flow through them easily.

Sometimes the arteries can become damaged by a build-up of fatty deposits on the walls of the arteries. The damage is to the lining of the arteries. It is a bit like the scale that builds up inside a kettle. In time these deposits get harder. This narrows the arteries and affects how much blood can get through. The medical name for this is atherosclerosis.

This may mean that there is the blood is not getting through as well as it should to allow enough oxygen and nutrients to skin and muscles.

What causes this damage to arteries?

As you get older, your arteries naturally begin to harden and get narrower, which can lead to atherosclerosis and damage to the arteries. This can be worse if you have a family history of heart disease and atherosclerosis.

However, there are other things that can speed up this process:

- Smoking can damage the walls of your arteries. Tiny blood cells, known as platelets, will then form at the site of the damage to try to repair it, which can cause your arteries to narrow.
- If you have poorly controlled type 1 diabetes or type 2 diabetes, the excess glucose in your blood can damage your arteries.
- If you have high levels of cholesterol in your blood.
- High blood pressure. Your arteries are designed to pump blood at a certain pressure, and if blood pressure is too high, the walls of the arteries can become damaged. High blood pressure can be caused by:
 - being overweight
 - drinking large amounts of alcohol
 - stress
 - smoking
 - a lack of exercise

How do I know if I have a problem?

You may have developed pain in your legs, especially when you are walking, but also in bed at night. Your doctor may have found that you have a high level of cholesterol in your blood.

How can I reduce the risk?

If you smoke, try to stop. If you would like help with stopping smoking, please contact a member of the Hospital Stop Smoking Team on 01384 456111 ext. 2783.

Regular exercise such as walking helps to reduce the symptoms of arterial disorders of the lower leg, such as pain. It also encourages circulation. It may reduce the risk of developing another cardiovascular disease (problem with the heart and/or blood vessels). Ask your GP or nurse for information on the best exercise for you.

Eat a healthy diet, maintaining a healthy weight and cutting down on alcohol. Ask for advice from your GP or nurse about this.

Your doctor may suggest other things for your specific condition.

If I already have damage, what can I do?

As your skin may be more at risk of getting a wound that is difficult to heal, you can consider the following:

- Take care when cutting your toenails or removing hard skin from your feet. It may be a good idea to get expert help from a podiatrist (chiroprapist).
- Wear well-fitting shoes to avoid blisters and calluses.
- Do not sit too close to a source of heat. You should be careful to protect your legs from direct heat.
- Be careful with the temperature of bath water so as not to burn your skin. This also applies to using hot water bottles and foot spas.
- If pain prevents you from going to bed, it is very important to ask your GP for advice quickly. Sitting for long periods with your legs down will result in swelling around your ankles. This makes your skin more prone to becoming sore.

Try to avoid sitting down for long periods with your legs down. If you get more pain in your legs when you sit with your feet up, or when you are in bed at night, you must discuss this with your GP or nurse.

Can I find out more?

You can find out more from the following website:

NHS Choices

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/peripheralarterialdisease/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

Leg Ulcer Management Team contact details

01384 321425 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

Leg Ulcer Management Team
Brierley Hill Health and Social Care Centre
Venture Way
Brierley Hill
DY5 1RU

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:

<http://dudleygroup.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/patient-information-leaflets/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email patient.information@dgh.nhs.uk

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.

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此宣传单可提供大字版本、音频版本和其它语言版本，请拨打电话：0800 073 0510。

Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

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Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru vă rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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