



High Cholesterol and Peripheral Arterial Disease (PAD)

Cholesterol is a fatty substance that builds up in your bloodstream. High cholesterol can damage arteries. This puts you at higher risk of peripheral arterial disease (PAD). PAD is a disease of arteries in the legs. If you have PAD, it's likely that arteries in other parts of the body are diseased, too. That puts you at high risk of heart attack and other heart diseases. Read on to learn how high cholesterol can lead to PAD and affect your health.

What Is Cholesterol?

Your total cholesterol can be measured by a blood test. There are two kinds of cholesterol:

- LDL (low-density lipoprotein) is a particle that carries cholesterol in the bloodstream and deposits it in artery walls. It's known as "bad cholesterol."
- HDL (high-density lipoprotein) is a particle that picks up excess cholesterol from artery walls. HDL is known as "good cholesterol."

How Can High Cholesterol Lead to Peripheral Arterial Disease?

Having high cholesterol (or a high LDL level) promotes buildup of plaque in the arteries. Plaque is waxy material made up of cholesterol and other particles. When there is too much plaque, the arteries can become narrowed and restrict blood flow. High levels of triglycerides (fats that travel in the blood to be used for energy) also increase risk of blockage. If high cholesterol isn't controlled, this makes it more likely for you to develop PAD and other heart problems. But high cholesterol can be controlled with diet changes, exercise, and medication.

What Happens If High Cholesterol Isn't Controlled?

- The higher your LDL and triglyceride levels, the higher your risk of heart attack, stroke, and worsened PAD.
- Even if your LDL is normal, a low HDL puts you at risk of all types of vascular disease.

What Happens If High Cholesterol Is Controlled?

- Lowering LDL reduces the risk of heart attack, stroke, heart or artery surgery, and worsened PAD.
- Raising HDL may also help improve these risks.