

CLAUDICATION



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

A feeling of muscle fatigue or cramp-like pain, usually in one or both legs. The discomfort occurs after minimal exercise, such as a short walk, and is normally relieved by resting. The calf is more often affected, but it can occur in the thighs, buttocks, hips, or feet. It is more common in men than in women, particularly men over age 55.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Pain, tension, weakness, or cramping in the limb.
- Pain occurs while walking, and pain stops when resting.
- Unable to walk distances.
- Loss of the hair on the toes or lower legs.
- Lameness or limping.

CAUSES

- Blockage or narrowing of the arteries of the legs due to atherosclerosis.
- Rarer cause is spinal stenosis (pressure on nerve roots that pass into either leg).

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Being a male, women after menopause, age over 60.
- Smoking.
- Diabetes.
- Being sedentary (getting little or no exercise).
- High blood pressure.
- Overweight.
- Heart disease.
- High blood cholesterol.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Stop smoking.
- Weight loss, if overweight.
- Routine exercise program.
- Reduce the amount of saturated fats in the diet.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Gradual improvement in ability to walk distances without pain. Improvement may take 6 to 12 months. It is important to follow an exercise program.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Pain while resting, as well as when walking.
- Increased risk of falls, due to being unsteady.
- People with diabetes are at highest risk for problems.
- Blood clots, tissue loss, gangrene, and amputation (rare).



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask questions about your symptoms. A variety of medical tests, including an ultrasound (sometimes done with exercise), may be ordered. These will help confirm the diagnosis and rule out other disorders that have similar symptoms.
- You will be given exercises to do at home, and/or supervised exercises that are done on a treadmill.
- Quit smoking. Find a way to stop that works for you.
- High blood pressure and high cholesterol may be treated with drugs.
- Various surgical procedures, depending on the site of the disease and the health of the patient, are available for more severe cases.

MEDICATIONS

- Low doses of aspirin may be prescribed.
- Drugs to lower blood pressure and reduce cholesterol levels, and special drugs to increase blood flow may be prescribed.
- Taking vitamins C, E, and B has helped some people. Ask your health care provider about taking them.

ACTIVITY

- Begin an exercise program. Walking or riding an exercise bike is recommended. Stop and rest if the pain becomes more severe. Try for 30 to 60 minutes of exercise 3 to 5 days a week.
- Strength training for the arms and legs also helps to improve symptoms.

DIET

Eat a healthy diet (include fruits, vegetables, and fiber). Consider a weight-loss diet, if overweight is a problem.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of claudication.
- You experience chest pain, shortness of breath, or rapid heart-beat during exercise.
- Drugs used for treatment cause unexpected side effects.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page