

# CottageHouseCall

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Issue 24 • Page 1



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## ***Leg Pain Can Be a Sign of Real Danger***

Nearly 12 million Americans experience poor circulation in their legs. Poor circulation usually surfaces as leg pain while walking and may actually signal a serious condition commonly referred to as peripheral arterial disease.

Peripheral arterial disease, also known as P.A.D., is a condition in which the arteries in the legs suffer from restricted blood flow. This decrease in blood flow does not allow the tissues in the legs to get enough oxygen, which can create pain. P.A.D. is likely to be a sign of atherosclerosis, which is accumulation of fatty deposits or plaque in arteries.

Atherosclerosis can reduce blood flow in your arteries to vital organs such as your heart and brain, as well as your legs. So while you may feel annoyed by the pain in your legs there could be much more at risk. If you have numbness, cramping or pain in your legs while walking or climbing stairs, see your physician. Your doctor may use one of the following methods for diagnosis:

- Physical exam. Your doctor may find signs of PAD during a physical examination. A physician may be looking for evidence of absent pulses or non-healing legs wounds.
- Ankle-brachial index (ABI). Compares the blood pressure in your ankle with the blood pressure in your arm.
- Doppler Ultrasound. A non-invasive test to determine blood flow through blood vessels.
- Angiography. By injecting a dye into your blood vessels, this test allows your doctor to view blood flow through your arteries as it happens.
- Blood tests. A sample of your blood can be used to measure your cholesterol.

PAD becomes more common as one gets older, and by age 65, about 12 to 20 percent of the population have it and remain a higher risk for heart attack or stroke by four to five times. If you suffer from leg pain or cramping, see your physician soon.

In some patients with P.A.D., lifestyle changes such as smoking cessation, diabetes control or controlling cholesterol levels can help improve symptoms. However, surgery may be necessary for more serious cases. Your surgeon may recommend one of the following:

- Angioplasty and Stenting: In this procedure, a catheter (a small hollow tube) is threaded through a blood vessel to the affected artery. Then a small balloon is inflated to reopen the artery.
- Bypass surgery: Your surgeon may perform an operation to bypass the blocked artery by using either your own vein or a prosthetic graft.

About the surgeon: Mark Davis, M.D., F.A.C.S., is a board certified general surgeon and a Fellow of the American College of surgeons who specializes in the care of P.A.D. His office is located in the Cottage Medical Professional Seminary Building in Galesburg. For an appointment call 309-343-7773.

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