

Peripheral Artery Disease (PAD): Getting started on a walking program

What is PAD?

PAD is a condition where the blood vessels that bring blood to your legs and feet (arteries) are narrowed or blocked by a waxy material called plaque [plak]. The blockage can cause pain in your buttocks, thighs, calves, or feet when you are active. It can also cause wounds in these areas to heal more slowly. PAD cannot be cured, but treatments can improve blood flow and reduce pain.

Why walk?

Walking can help reduce pain and cramping. It can also help you walk further without having to stop. Walking is a health activity that helps you:

- Feel better, do more, and stay active longer
- Reduce stress
- Reach and maintain a healthy weight
- Improve blood pressure and blood glucose (sugar) and cholesterol, lowering your chances of a heart attack or stroke

How do I start a walking program?

You will start your walking program at a fitness or rehabilitation center. There, your exercise specialist will watch your blood pressure, heart rate, and heart rhythm as you walk. They will check your pain levels as you exercise and adjust the program as needed. They will also:

- Make sure any health problems — like diabetes — stay in control
- Help with your nutrition goals
- Send updates to your doctor.

As you get stronger, they will help you build an at-home program that you can do on your own, with a family member, or at a gym.



What do I need to do to stay safe?

Follow these tips to stay safe and get the most out of your walking program:

- Wear comfortable shoes and socks. Make sure they are not too loose or too tight.
- Check your feet every day for blisters, wounds, or sore spots. Tell us right away if you find one.
- Ask your spouse or a good friend to walk with you. It makes it more enjoyable and is safer, especially at first. When you are stronger, you can listen to music, a podcast, or a book with headphones.
- Consider using a cane or walker if you have balance problems. It's good to have that extra support. A walker with a seat provides a place to rest.
- Track your progress:
 - Wear a watch and time how long you can walk before you feel pain.
 - Write down how long and how far you walked each time.

Your might not see changes for the first 2 months, but don't be discouraged. Over time, you will start to see and feel the difference.

My walking program

What are 3 reasons you want to start a walking program?

What are 3 things you will do to stay with your walking program?

Who will help you start and stay with your walking program?

Examples of a walking program

1 Warm up (5 minutes).

Walk slowly for 5 minutes to help your joints and muscles loosen up. Do some easy stretches if it feels good.

2 Start walking.

Start at a pace that will make you feel a mild or moderate amount of pain or discomfort within 3 to 5 minutes.

- The pain may be a cramp or burning pain, or feel like extreme tiredness.
- You may feel the pain in your calf (lower leg) or one leg may hurt more than the other.
- Walking uphill may make it hurt worse or hurt sooner.

Take your time and be patient. The pain will get better.

3 Stop and rest.

When you reach a moderate level of pain, stop and rest until it goes away. You can rest while standing or sitting.

4 Continue walking and stopping.

After the pain is gone, walk some more. Rest when your body tells you to. If you are not feeling some discomfort, you might not be working hard enough. The goal is to have some level of pain before you stop walking. As your legs get better, you can build up to walking for 35 to 40 minutes each day - NOT counting the time that you rest.

5 Cool down and track your progress.

Finish your program by walking slowly for the last 5 minutes. You can also do some light stretching as your body cools down. Write down your time, distance, and symptoms. Congratulate yourself on a great workout!

6 Stick with your program.

The key to getting better is sticking with it. Once you reach your goal of 30 to 40 minutes, do it 3 to 5 times each week. If you feel strong enough, raise your walking time to 50 or 60 minutes each time, or try walking uphill. Walking at least 3 times a week is needed to make progress.

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