

Health Awareness

Potentially Dangerous Leg Pain Often Confused With Sign Of Aging

(NAPSA)—Many Americans assume their aches and pains are just common signs of growing older. Frequent leg pain and cramping that make it hard to walk can often be confused with common conditions like arthritis or muscle strain. These symptoms, however, may also be signs of peripheral artery disease (P.A.D.).

What is P.A.D.?

P.A.D. is a chronic condition in which leg arteries become narrowed or clogged due to the formation of plaque.

What Does a Diagnosis Mean For You?


A diagnosis of P.A.D. may be a warning sign of a similar problem in the arteries that lead to your heart or brain. If the arteries supplying blood to the heart or brain get significantly blocked, it may lead to a heart attack or stroke. In fact, if you have P.A.D., you are at more than double the risk of having a heart attack or stroke than those without P.A.D.

“Many patients come to me complaining of leg pain which they may mistake for arthritic pain or old age,” explained Dr. Peter Sheehan, Director, Diabetes Center of Greater New York, Cabrini Medical Center. “Most patients I diagnose are not even aware of P.A.D. and its associated risk for heart attack or stroke.”

Who is at Risk?

You may be at risk for P.A.D. if you have one or more of the following risk factors:

- Aged 50 years or older and one or more of the following:
 - Have high blood pressure
 - Have high cholesterol
 - Have diabetes
 - Smoke or used to smoke
 - Have a personal or family history of heart attack or stroke

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- Aged 70 years or older
- Even if you do not have any of the risk factors mentioned above, you may still be at risk for P.A.D.

Many people diagnosed with P.A.D. do not have any of the noticeable symptoms such as leg pain or cramping. In fact, nearly 50 percent of people with P.A.D. do not have any recognizable symptoms. If you fall into any of the risk factors above, it's important to talk to your doctor even if you do not experience any physical symptoms. People who are at risk for P.A.D. should obtain an early diagnosis.

Getting Diagnosed and Taking Healthy Steps

P.A.D. testing is relatively easy and can be performed by your doctor. If you are diagnosed with P.A.D., lifestyle changes and treatment options are important steps

in helping to reduce the risk of heart attack or stroke associated with the condition. Lifestyle changes include adopting a healthy diet and exercise program and stopping smoking.

Talk to Your Doctor About Other Options

If you think you or someone you know might be at risk for P.A.D., talk to your doctor.

“It is critical to understand the steps P.A.D. patients can take to help reduce their risk of having a heart attack or stroke,” said Dr. Sheehan. “Talk to your doctor about exercise, dietary changes and appropriate medication, such as antiplatelet therapy, to help reduce your risk.”

In addition to lifestyle changes, doctors may recommend appropriate medication to help reduce the risk of heart attack or stroke associated with P.A.D. Other interventions such as angioplasty and peripheral artery bypass surgery may be necessary for patients with advanced P.A.D. Medications are also available to help reduce leg pain.

Ask your doctor or health care provider if screening for P.A.D. is covered by your health plan or by Medicare as part of a physical check up. If you need treatment with medicines, your doctor or pharmacist can help you find out which drugs are covered by your health plan or your Medicare Part D drug plan.

To learn more about the risks associated with P.A.D. and treatment options, visit www.ncoa.org.