



Focus on Walking

Walking to improve vascular health and reduce symptoms of peripheral artery disease (PAD)

How Does PAD Affect Walking?

When you walk, your leg muscles need more oxygen from blood than when sitting or standing. But if you have PAD, the arteries have a hard time delivering this extra oxygen. That's because they're narrowed by plaque buildup from cholesterol and other substances. The medical term for this is **claudication**. People with PAD may experience two types of pain:

- Pain at rest or pain at night while sleeping
- Pain while walking

The most common symptom of PAD is pain or discomfort in the legs. You might experience cramping, aching, or fatigue while walking. However, starting a daily habit of walking (and following the tips below) can help you walk farther with less pain.

Why Is Walking Important?

If you have PAD, a walking program can make a big difference. Walking every day may help build up **collateral circulation**—a network of blood vessels that go around

artery blockages—in your legs. This means that you can grow new pathways for blood to improve circulation. And better circulation means your muscles will get more oxygen and nutrients. This can reduce pain and discomfort in the long run if you stick with the walking program.

The goal of a walking program is to walk to the point of feeling some pain, rest briefly, and repeating the process. The length of time between walking and resting may be short in the beginning. And that's OK! Over time, the hope is that you can walk farther before needing a break. The farther you can walk, the more collateral circulation you can develop. Need more motivation to get going? Consider these other perks:

- Walking is a simple, easy, and inexpensive activity!
- Walking can be done at any age and requires no special talent. All you need is a pair of good walking shoes.
- Walking can be a social activity! You can invite your friends, family, or your favorite pet!
- Walking is self-rewarding. It's something you do for yourself to improve your health.

A walking program, along with diet and lifestyle changes, is key to treating PAD. Not to mention, it can help reduce the risk for heart disease and stroke.

What Type of Walking Program is Best for PAD?

There are two types of walking programs: **a supervised program** and **a home-based program**.

Supervised walking programs are offered through cardiac rehabilitation, medical fitness centers, hospitals, or vascular surgery practices. You usually only have to pay a small fee. But in some cases, insurance plans may cover the cost. A typical program lasts three to six months. Each week includes three or more supervised walking sessions on a treadmill

For more information, review these related flyers:

- Lifesaving Tips About ... High Blood Pressure and PAD
- Lifesaving Tips About ... Smoking and PAD
- What Is Peripheral Artery Disease?

or track. There is no set pace—everything will be modified to meet your specific needs. Over time, the program will send updates about your progress to you and your health care provider. Research shows that almost all patients improve their walking abilities through these programs.

Understandably, many people with PAD

do not have access to supervised programs. This guide will help you start your own home-based walking program. And even if you're part of a supervised program, you can still use these tips to keep up with walking at home.

Remember: Before starting any home-based walking program, talk with

your health care provider first. Your provider or specialist will make sure there are no medical conditions that would prevent you from safely walking. Some things to consider include current medications; history of arthritis; cardiac disease; and limitations due to balance, posture, or loss of sensation in your feet.

Walking Program 101



Getting Started

Before starting your walking program, ask your provider:

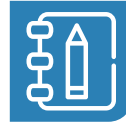
- *What type of shoes and socks should I wear?* A good pair of shoes is key to your success. It is very important to wear shoes and socks that fit comfortably and aren't too tight. Shoes that don't fit right or feel painful can impact your progress.
- *Are there any other tests I need before I begin?* In some cases, patients might need to take an exercise test or treadmill evaluation to assess their walking ability.
- *How often should I walk or exercise?* Your health care provider may have specific instructions on how hard to exercise, as well as how long and how many times per week.
- *What should I be monitoring for?* For example, your provider may tell you to inspect your feet daily to check for blisters or sores.



Set a Schedule

After speaking with your health care provider, the next step is to start! Find a time when you can spend an hour walking, three or more times per week. It's OK to start small and "walk" your way up. What matters most is that you take the first step. After all, walking can be just as important as taking your medications. When setting up your walking schedule, consider:

- What time of day feels the most comfortable to walk?
- How many times a week can I realistically go for a walk? (When you are first starting, it is important to take it one week at a time.)
- What is a goal I can commit to for the first week? Then the second?
- Where are some places that would feel comfortable for me to walk? It's OK to change your scenery. And don't forget to plan for things like weather changes.



Tracking Your Progress

It helps to record your progress every week or two to see how you are doing. When you're first starting, try to use the same walking route so that it's easier to compare results. To check your progress:

- Write down the time or distance at which your pain causes you to stop and rest. Note this on your phone, a small notebook, or the [Walking Progress Log](#) below.
- Walk again to where you must stop and rest. Write down the time or location. Continue this process throughout the exercise session.
- Be sure to update the [Walking Progress Log](#) at the end of the walk if you were taking notes on your phone or in a notebook.
- If you have access to tools such as a basic pedometer, this can help track your steps!



Drink Plenty of Water

It is important to drink lots of water and stay hydrated when you are walking. Take some water with you whether it is cold or hot outside. Water helps keep blood flowing through your body and joints moving smoothly.



Final Thoughts

A walking program increases the speed, distance, and time you can walk before experiencing pain. You might start to notice improvements after two to three months. But for some people, it can take up to six months to see a difference. Over time, the benefits from exercise will continue to increase and build collateral circulation. *Remember: You must stick to your walking schedule to maintain these improvements.*

Hopefully, you'll find walking so helpful that it becomes a permanent part of your life. Set reasonable goals by knowing your limits before starting the program.

“Walking until you feel moderate leg pain helps build collateral circulation. Over time, this may improve PAD leg symptoms.”

Your Walking Program—Step-by-Step

STEP 1: Warm-Up



As with any exercise, it is a good idea to warm up for at least five to 10 minutes before you start. Begin with very slow and easy walking. Or do some stretches, focusing on thigh and calf muscles.

STEP 2: Walk



Begin walking and increase the pace until you reach a moderate level of pain. Use the [Walking Pain Scale](#) as a guide. Moderate pain is a 3 or 4 on the scale—it might feel like a charley horse, a cramp, or tightness.

Walking until you feel moderate leg pain helps build collateral circulation. Over time, this may improve PAD leg symptoms.

Try to walk at a pace that causes moderate pain for at least three to five minutes. If you can walk longer than five minutes without pain in your legs, you may have to increase your speed. If you cannot walk faster, try walking up a hill or changing the incline on a treadmill to a more challenging setting. If these options are not possible, try to walk a little longer.

STEP 3: Stop and Rest



Stop walking after you reach a pain level of 3 or 4 and cannot walk farther. Rest until the pain is gone. This may take several minutes. *If you have chest pain while walking that doesn't go away when resting, contact your health care provider right away.*

STEP 4: Walk, Stop, Rest, and Repeat



After the pain is gone, repeat the walk/stop pattern several times. The goal is to walk for a total of 50 minutes during each session. This does not include rest breaks. When you first start your walking program, it's OK to set a goal of 10 to 20 minutes. Try to build up to 50 minutes by adding three to five minutes to your session each week. If you can commit to walking daily, your endurance will get better and better. This is an excellent sign of improvement. Continue to build up your collateral circulation by challenging yourself. For example, if you find that you can walk for eight to 10 minutes without reaching a pain level of 3 or 4, it's time to increase your speed or distance.

Remember to set yourself up for success: Drink water before and after you exercise. Wear comfortable clothing and shoes so that your exercise goes off without a hitch!

STEP 5: Cool Down and Stretch



Finish your walk by doing gentle leg stretches of your thigh and calf muscles for at least five to 10 minutes. Stretching after exercise helps reduce sore muscles. When you're done, record your session in the [Walking Progress Log](#).

WALKING PAIN SCALE

Use this five-point scale to help you figure out your level of pain.

1

= No pain

2

= Onset of pain

3

= Mild pain

4

= Moderate pain

5

= Severe pain

Practical Tips

- Ask a friend or family member to walk with you. It will help pass the time and motivate you to keep going. It will also be good for their health!
- Don't be discouraged if you cannot walk far at first. Reaching your goals takes time. Try different routes to make your walks more interesting. If you're walking alone, bring your phone or another device so you can listen to music, podcasts, or books as you exercise.
- If you miss a walking appointment, don't stress. Simply get back to your usual schedule as soon as possible.
- Use the **Walking Progress Log** provided or make one of your own.
- If needed, bring an assistive device or a chair seat so you always have a place to sit and rest.
- Carry a watch and a pedometer to help track your steps and the time.

Remember, you deserve to enjoy the best health possible. Take the time to walk for your well-being.

Walking Progress Log

My starting point: I currently walk _____ blocks or for _____ minutes before I have leg pain or cramps. I currently have to make _____ stops to rest to get to _____ (place).

Goal: _____

Examples: I want to walk _____ (distance) in _____ (minutes) or before I stop. I want to walk _____ blocks with no more than _____ stops.

Week ____	Walk 1	Walk 2	Walk 3	Walk 4
Date				
Start time				
End time				
Total time				
Number of stops to rest				
Distance walked/route				
Comments, thoughts, or problems				

Questions for Your Doctor

It is important to work closely with your health care provider about your diagnosis and treatment. You can bring this form with you to help talk to your medical provider about any questions and concerns you may have.

