

Peripheral artery disease: Overlooked and underdiagnosed

It's a hard-to-pronounce condition, but it's one to take seriously because it can lead to loss of limbs.

If you have persistent pain, numbness or cramping in your legs and arms, you should talk to a doctor about peripheral artery disease (PAD).

PAD occurs when arteries that supply oxygen-rich blood to the arms and legs become partially or completely blocked by substances commonly known as plaque.

[Sampath Kumar, MD](#), is an interventional cardiologist (cardiovascular specialist) who provides care at OSF HealthCare in [Alton, Illinois](#). He repeats a refrain that's common among all health care providers: your best chance to avoid PAD is to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

"We see this more in people who smoke," Dr. Kumar says.

Another risk factor: "People who are not as active tend to present [with PAD] much later because they don't have the symptoms which are typical," Dr. Kumar says. "So seeking early care and regular care with a physician would be an important piece."

Diabetes and high cholesterol are also significant risks. So eat healthy and avoid food and drink with excess sugar, Dr. Kumar advises.

Treatment of PAD might start with an angiogram, or a scan of your blood flow. From there, a doctor may recommend medication, lifestyle changes or surgery in more serious cases. At OSF HealthCare in Alton, Dr. Kumar recently started using the state-of-the-art [Diamondback system](#) to help open up blocked arteries during those procedures. This has helped, he says, with reducing the number and extent of amputations, helping patients navigate their function with as little limb loss as possible given the extent of their disease state.

"What we are trying to do is to provide a safe way to remove tissue and to provide blood flow into the arteries," to allow for wound healing or to enable better function overall, Dr. Kumar explains.

"So with removal of tissue, especially calcium in a controlled fashion, we end up with less complications as far as patients are concerned. So there's less need for stents in the arteries, less need for emergent complications that need to be managed."

September is PAD awareness month, making it a perfect time to talk to your health care provider if you think it's affecting you.

"This is something that doesn't start in your 60s and 70s. This is something that people need to start off with in their 20s, 30s and 40s," Dr. Kumar says. "So for people who present to me with vascular disease, I would urge them to talk to their family and their children and ensure that the lifestyle that their future generations lead would be healthier."