



## Why walk?

Walking can make a real difference for people with peripheral artery disease (PAD). Recent studies show that for many people with PAD, a structured walking program is one of the best treatments for reducing leg pain or cramps (claudication) when walking. In fact, studies show that over time **a structured walking program is often more effective and can work better than medicine or surgery** in helping people with PAD walk longer and further without having to stop due to pain. A regular walking program will:

- Let you do more and stay active.
- Reduce stress and help you relax.
- Help you control your blood glucose, blood pressure, cholesterol, and body weight.
- Improve muscle tone.
- Lower your chances of having a heart attack or stroke.
- Give you peace of mind that you are taking care of your health.

## How do I start a walking program?

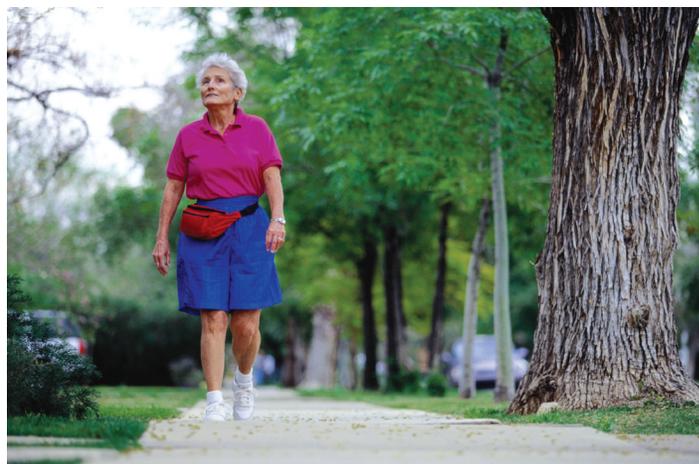
**The best way to start is with a special supervised walking program designed for people with PAD.** In this type of program, you will work closely with health professionals who know about PAD and who will design a treadmill or track walking program for you. Your health care provider can help you find a structured PAD walking program at a local hospital or a cardiac rehabilitation or clinical exercise center.

If you cannot go to a supervised PAD walking program, **you can start walking on your own using the program guidelines (on right).** You can walk on a treadmill at home or at a gym. You can also walk in a mall or a safe place outdoors. Before you start, talk with your health care provider to set up a program that is right for you.

## How do I start a walking program?

Whether you go to a special supervised PAD walking program or do it on your own, keep these points in mind.

- **Make time in your schedule to walk at least 3 to 5 times per week.**
- **Set your first goal to build up to 35 minutes** of total walking time, not counting the time you take to rest when you start feeling pain in your legs.
- **Build up slowly to the final goal of 50 minutes** of total walking time. This can take a few months.
- **As you improve and feel less pain, try to add 5 minutes of walking** each week. Most people start to see real changes in two to three months, but it could take longer.
- **Stick with your program** to maintain the improvements you make in walking longer and farther with less pain.
- **Try not to take off more than two days** between sessions so that you keep your muscles working.
- **Take your time.** Although it may hurt at first, over time you will be able to walk longer with less pain.



## What steps do I need to take to get the most out of my PAD walking program?

Research studies show that people with PAD get the best results when they attend a supervised, structured walking program that uses the steps described below.

### Step 1 Warm up. (5 minutes)

Start each session by walking slowly for two or three minutes to loosen up your legs. Do some easy stretching. Stretch your calf and thigh muscles in each leg for 10 to 15 seconds. Use the stretches shown below as a guide.

**Wall Push**—Stretch your calf by leaning your hands against a wall and stand about 3 to 4 feet away from the wall. Bring one foot closer to the wall, bend the knee and point it toward the wall. Keep your back leg straight, with your foot flat and your toes pointed straight ahead. Hold for 10 to 15 seconds and repeat with the other leg.

**Leg Curl**—Stretch the front of your right thigh by leaning your left hand against the wall. Pull your right foot to your buttocks with your right hand. Keep your knee pointing straight to the ground. Hold for 10 to 15 seconds. Lean your right hand against the wall and then repeat the thigh stretch with your left foot and hand.

### Step 2 Start walking.

Walk at a pace that will produce a mild or moderate amount of pain within 3 to 5 minutes. The pain may feel like a "Charlie horse," a cramp or tightness in your calf or thigh. On a scale of 1 to 5, you would rate mild pain a 3 and moderate pain a 4.

### Step 3 Stop and rest.

When you reach a pain level of 3 or 4, stop and rest until the pain goes away. You can rest standing or sitting.

### Step 4 Repeat the Walk and Stop steps.

After the pain is gone, repeat the walk and rest steps several times. Although it may hurt, you need to walk fast enough to feel mild to moderate pain in your legs. If you don't feel pain, you may not be working hard enough to get the rewards of the program. You may have been told to stop exercising when you feel any pain such as pain in your chest. The goal for a PAD program, however, is to reach a moderate level of leg pain before you stop.

During the first two months of your walking program, build up slowly to walking a total of 35 minutes each session, not counting the rest breaks. Add a few minutes each week as you improve.

Over time, try to add 5 minutes to your sessions each week to reach the goal of 50 minutes of total walking time.

### Step 5 Cool down.

Finish each walking session by walking slowly again for the last 5 minutes. Take a few minutes to stretch your calf and thigh muscles again. After stretching, cross your hands to your shoulders and give yourself a hug for the great workout you just finished.

### Step 6 Stick with your walking program.

Once you have achieved your goal of 50 minutes of walking time at least 3 to 5 times a week, stay with your program. As walking becomes easier and you can go farther without pain, challenge yourself to work harder. Try walking up hills or stairs as part of your walking session. Or add an incline to your treadmill routine. Mark your calendar each week for the days and times you will walk and try not to get sidetracked. If you miss a walking session, or you're too busy to walk the full 50 minutes, walk a few minutes a few times a day when you can.



## Tips for Getting the Most Out of Your Walking Program

- Wear shoes that feel good on your feet and are not too tight or too loose. The shoes should be sturdy, not worn out, and have thick and soft soles to cushion your feet and absorb shock. Always wear socks or stockings to prevent blisters. This is very important if you have diabetes.
- Examine your feet daily, especially if you have diabetes. You may have cuts, sores, blisters, or splinters that you may not feel. Call your health care team if you find a cut or sore that does not heal. Untreated, these problems can cause severe infections and lead to losing a foot or a leg.
- Find a friend to walk with you and help you enjoy your walking sessions. Your friend should be able to walk on the same schedule and at the same speed.
- Have fun while you walk. You can listen to music. Take a walk in the park. Walk in the mall and window shop. Or find a community center that has a treadmill and try it out. Vary your walking program so you don't get bored.
- Treat yourself to buying a cane that has a seat so you can have a place to sit and rest.
- Wear a watch when you walk so you can see how long you can go before you feel pain in your legs. For your next birthday, ask for a stop watch so you can track the minutes you walk.
- Track your progress by writing down the number of minutes and the total distance you walk during each session, and how long you have walked before you feel leg pain. Make a simple chart and post it in your kitchen or bedroom so you can see how much progress you have made.



- Reward yourself for meeting your walking goals. Buy a new hat or a pair of socks or go to a movie.

Most of all, be patient and don't be hard on yourself. It has taken many years for PAD to develop in your legs. It will take a few months before you start to feel better, move more with less pain, and enjoy going places and doing things that used to make you feel tired.

## My Life Saving Walking Plan

Write down three reasons you want to start a walking program.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Write down three things you will do to stay with your walking program.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Write down the people who can help you start and stay with your walking program. (for example, a friend, a co-worker, or your health care team):

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Remember:** *Starting and staying with a regular walking program can help keep your legs healthy, lower your risk for heart attack or stroke, and help save your life and limbs.*

## THE VASCULAR DISEASE FOUNDATION

Established in 1998, The Vascular Disease Foundation (VDF) develops educational information and initiatives for patients, their families and friends, and health care providers regarding often ignored, but serious vascular diseases. In fact, VDF is the only multidisciplinary national public 501(c)(3) non-profit organization focused on providing public education and improving awareness about vascular diseases. For more information, visit [vasculardisease.org](http://vasculardisease.org).

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