



What is the link between blood clots and PAD?

Peripheral artery disease (PAD) is a common disease that occurs when the arteries in the legs become narrowed or clogged with fatty deposits, or *plaque*. When leg arteries are clogged, blood flow to the legs and feet is reduced. PAD may cause leg muscle pain when walking, but many people with PAD do not have any symptoms.

People with PAD are at high risk for a heart attack or stroke because of the buildup of plaque in their blood vessels or arteries. Eventually, the tip of the plaque breaks off and red blood cells called *platelets* clump together inside the blood vessel to form a clot on top of the plaque. This is the same kind of clot that forms on your skin to stop the bleeding when you cut yourself. But when a clot forms inside a blood vessel, it can limit or even block the flow of blood to your heart or brain, causing chest pain, a heart attack or stroke.

The good news is studies show that medicines that help prevent blood clots from forming can help reduce your risk of a heart attack or stroke.

What medicines are used to prevent blood clots?

Medicines that prevent blood clots from forming are called *antiplatelet drugs*. These medicines may be given to people who have had a heart attack or have chest pain or PAD in their legs. The two main antiplatelet drugs are aspirin and clopidogrel. Your health care team will review your records and talk with you to find out which of these drugs is best for you.

Many people who have PAD take these medicines. The usual dosage of aspirin is 75 to 325 mg of aspirin each day. The low-dose version of aspirin may be labeled as “baby aspirin.” Some health care providers suggest taking the kind of aspirin that is coated. The coated form of aspirin allows it to pass through your stomach without dissolving. Instead, the aspirin is absorbed in the intestine, lowering the risk of side effects.

The usual dosage of clopidogrel is 75 mg per day. Some health care providers suggest taking both aspirin and clopidogrel each day to lower the risk of heart attack or stroke. Talk with your health care team about the best medicines for you.

Are antiplatelet medicines safe for everyone?

Taking aspirin or clopidogrel is not safe for everyone. For example, some people cannot take aspirin. It affects the lining of their stomach, causing pain, nausea, vomiting or bleeding. You should avoid aspirin if:

- You are allergic to it
- You tend to bleed
- You have had bleeding in your digestive tract in the past few months
- You have liver disease.

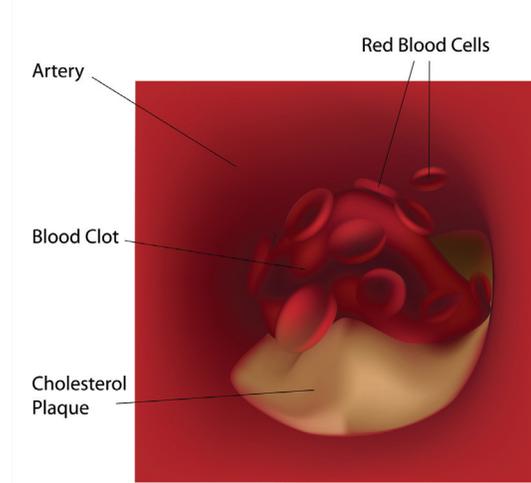
You should avoid taking clopidogrel if you have a stomach ulcer or another condition that causes bleeding. Also, if you are having surgery or other procedure to treat blocked blood vessels, be sure to tell your health care provider that you are taking clopidogrel.



What else can I do to prevent blood clots in my arteries?

Taking antiplatelet medicines is only one part of a treatment plan to reduce your risk for a heart attack or stroke and to treat PAD. Making heart healthy lifestyle changes is also very important for keeping your cholesterol, blood pressure and blood sugar (if you have diabetes) under control. Take steps now to follow a heart healthy eating plan that includes lots of fruits and vegetables, low-fat dairy products and that is moderate in total fat and low in saturated fat and cholesterol. Also, strive to get at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most days. These steps can make a big difference in your health and in the way you feel.

BLOOD CLOT FORMS ON CHOLESTEROL PLAQUE IN AN ARTERY



Remember: Finding and treating PAD early can help keep your legs healthy, lower your risk for heart attack or stroke, and save your life and limbs.

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