

## “PAD” Your Steps and--Stay In Circulation

In the United States, more than eight million Americans suffer from peripheral arterial disease (P.A.D.)—hardening of the arteries (also known as "atherosclerosis") in the limbs, most often the legs. P.A.D. is caused by the same risk factors that lead to heart disease. Those at risk include anyone over the age of 50, especially African Americans; those who smoke or have smoked; and those who have diabetes, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, or a personal or family history of vascular disease, heart attack, or stroke. P.A.D. is a common and treatable disease but is still largely unknown, often unrecognized, and regarded by many as a consequence of aging.

The National Medical Association (NMA) is working with Stay in Circulation, the first national public awareness program to help Americans learn about P.A.D., including how to reduce their risk, and the steps they can take to stay in circulation. The NMA is involved in this campaign in an effort to help our community take steps to learn about P.A.D.

You are at risk for P.A.D. if you:

- Are over the age of 50
- Smoke or have smoked
- Have diabetes
- Have high blood pressure
- Have high blood cholesterol
- Have a personal or family history of vascular disease, heart attack, or stroke
- Are African American.

People under the age of 50 with diabetes and one other cardiovascular risk factor are also at risk.

P.A.D. does not always present symptoms. In fact, many of those with P.A.D. do not experience obvious symptoms. For some people, the first sign of P.A.D. is "claudication," which can feel like fatigue, heaviness, tiredness, cramping, or pain in the leg muscles. Leg discomfort can be a sign that the leg arteries are already clogged. Symptoms of more severe cases of P.A.D. include foot or toe pain at rest that often disturbs sleep.

Taking these steps can help lower your risk for P.A.D.:

- Do not smoke, or if you do, ask your health care provider to help you come up with an immediate plan to quit.
- If you have diabetes, high blood pressure, or high blood cholesterol, talk to your health care provider about the best ways to manage and improve your condition.
- Maintain a healthy weight, make wise food choices, and get at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most days. Talk to your health care provider about the best diet and exercise plan for you. Most health care providers will recommend a diet low in saturated fat, *trans* fat, and cholesterol, and high in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

The campaign is sponsored by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute—part of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services—in cooperation with the P.A.D. Coalition. Ask your health care provider to check your risk for P.A.D. and take action today to lower it. Learning about P.A.D. can help you stay active and continue enjoying life. Visit [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/pad](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/pad) for more information.