

# Arterial Disorders of the Lower Leg



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I have been told I have problems with my arterial circulation

## Arteries

Arteries carry blood that is rich in oxygen and nutrients to your legs. This is needed to keep your skin and muscles in good condition. Blood flow through the arteries is moved by the pumping action of the heart. Once the arteries have delivered the oxygen and nutrients to the tissue in your legs the blood needs transporting back to the lungs and the heart. It is transported back through the veins.

When the arteries are healthy they are elastic and allow sufficient blood to flow constantly. Sometimes the lining of the arteries can become damaged, causing them to narrow, a bit like the scale that builds up on the element of a kettle. In time this deposit gets harder and affects how much blood can get through. This may mean that there is not enough blood getting through to allow sufficient oxygen and nutrients to the skin and muscles.

## What causes this damage to the arteries?

A main cause of damage is bad fats in the diet, often referred to as cholesterol. The effects of cigarette smoking are also harmful to the arteries. However, sometimes arterial problems may be hereditary.

## How do I know if I have a problem?

- You may have developed pain in your legs especially on walking, but also in bed at night.
- You may have been told that you have a high cholesterol level. You can have your cholesterol level checked by your Doctor.

## How can I reduce the risk?

- A good diet low in saturated fats and high in fibre, fruit and vegetables will help to reduce your risk of high cholesterol.
- Plenty of exercise is also good as this reduces the bad fats in the body.
- If you smoke, try to stop.

## If I already have damage what can I do?

If your arteries are already damaged it is important to consider the above points to prevent it getting worse. However, your skin may be more at risk of having a wound which is difficult to heal.

## The following points need to be considered:

- Take care when cutting your toenails or removing hard skin from your feet. It may be better to seek expert help from a Chiropodist.
- Wear good fitting shoes to avoid blisters and callus formation.



- Do not sit too close to a source of heat and be careful to protect your legs from direct heat.
- Be careful with the temperature of bath water so as not to burn your skin. This also applies to using hot water bottles and foot spas.
- Exercise is good as it encourages circulation but ask your doctor or nurse for information on the best exercise for you.
- Try to avoid sitting for long periods with your legs down. If you get more pain in your legs when you sit with them elevated, or when you are in bed at night discuss this with your doctor or nurse.
- If the pain prevents you from going to bed it is very important to seek help quickly. Sitting for long periods with your legs down will result in swelling around your ankles. This makes your skin more prone to becoming sore.
- Seek advice on your diet.

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