



Northern England
Strategic Clinical Networks

SHOULD YOU NEED HELP OR ADVICE,
PLEASE CONTACT THE PODIATRY DEPARTMENT AT:

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ON:

Tel:

PODIATRY ADVICE LEAFLET DIABETES – VASCULAR DISEASE

This leaflet is also available in large print.



What is vascular disease?

This is a disease of the blood vessels which results in reduced blood flow (Ischaemia). Peripheral Vascular Disease (PVD) affects the peripheral parts of the body (i.e. those furthest away), such as the legs and feet. The walls of the blood vessels become thickened and narrowed, which leads to poor circulation.

Deposits of fats, blood clots, high blood pressure, consistently high blood sugar levels and SMOKING can cause it.

As part of your annual foot check, the blood supply to your feet will be assessed and if found to be inadequate, appropriate measures will be taken.

How can vascular disease affect my feet?

In a healthy foot, the blood supply adequately nourishes the tissues no matter what the activity. If you suffer from ischaemia however, you may find exercise or simply walking uncomfortable. Minor wounds can prove difficult to heal and can easily deteriorate into ulcers. A significant danger for such a wound is infection, which, in a blood-starved area, can be difficult to treat. The infection can grow in seriousness and put the affected limb at risk of:

- Bone infection (osteomyelitis)
- Gangrene (death of tissue)
- Amputation (removal of part or all of a limb)

AT WORST, THE SITUATION CAN BECOME LIFE THREATENING.

In longstanding diabetes (i.e. those diagnosed for more than 10 years), some degree of nerve damage & vascular disease is common. If you smoke, this damage will be more severe.

What are the symptoms of peripheral vascular disease?

- Your legs and feet may tire easily while walking.
- You may experience pain in the thighs & calves of your legs while walking.

- You could get severe pain in your legs when you walk only a short distance, which forces you to stop & rest before you can start to walk again. If you suffer with neuropathy (nerve damage) however, it is possible that you may be unaware of these warning pains.
- You may notice colour and/or temperature change in your limbs.
- You may be more susceptible to chilblains in cooler weather and this may lead to areas of necrosis (dead tissue) & ulceration.
- Injuries e.g. cuts, scratches, blisters etc. may become infected and not heal as quickly as in the past.
- If severe, you may experience 'rest pain'. Rest pain is a burning sensation in the foot at night when you are in bed, causing you to get up out of bed, often ending up sleeping in a chair, so that you remain in a more vertical position at bed time.

How can peripheral vascular disease be treated?

If as a result of your assessment, you are suspected of having PVD, you may be referred to the vascular team to determine whether you have any narrowing or blockages.

Anyone can get PVD, but diabetes damages blood vessels in ways that make you especially susceptible. Cigarette smoking will worsen the problem, so it is advisable that you stop. If you are overweight, lose weight & keep walking - exercise can help.