

PAD TREATMENT: WHAT IS ATHERECTOMY?

TRANSCRIPT

If peripheral artery disease, or PAD, is getting in the way of your life every day, or if your blood flow is severely reduced because of a blockage, your healthcare provider may recommend a procedure called atherectomy. Atherectomy opens up the blocked artery and restores blood flow.

Arteries in your neck, legs, and arms, called peripheral arteries, circulate oxygen-rich blood throughout your body. Blood flows easily through a healthy peripheral artery. But over time, cholesterol and other fatty deposits, called plaque, can build up on the artery wall. This narrowing of the arteries is called atherosclerosis.

The artery can become partially blocked reducing blood flow to parts of your body. Because it is more common to have blockages in your legs, if you have PAD you may notice leg pain, called claudication; fatigue; cramping; dry, scaly skin; poor hair growth; and slow-healing wounds on your lower legs and feet.

If left untreated, the blockage can continue to build. Your peripheral arteries may narrow even further. A piece of plaque can break off of the blockage, travel down a vessel and get lodged in place, completely blocking the artery.

When oxygen-rich blood cannot get to a part of the body, damage occurs. This damage can cause serious complications, like amputation, and can even lead to heart attack and stroke.

For many people, lifestyle changes and medication may be enough to control the symptoms of PAD and improve overall heart health. But for some, atherectomy may be needed to restore blood flow through the peripheral arteries and prevent the long-term complications of PAD.

During the atherectomy procedure, a catheter, usually with a small, sharp razor attached to it, will be guided through the artery to the narrowed spot. The razor shaves away the plaque build-up widening the artery so that blood flows easily again. Your healthcare provider may choose to use a laser instead, to clear the blockage.

The atherectomy procedure usually takes about one hour. It can be done on an out-patient basis, which means you will go home the same day, or during a stay in the hospital.

PAD is serious. It is a warning sign that you are at risk for serious health problems, including heart attack and stroke. Atherectomy can restore blood flow to your arms, legs and feet, and reduce both the symptoms and the complications of PAD.