

Because PAD cannot be cured, life after a diagnosis of PAD requires a long-term commitment to preserving the health of your arteries and preventing complications of the disease. The good news is that women who dedicate themselves to healthy lifestyle changes and follow their PAD treatment plan will have fewer symptoms, better walking ability, and an improved quality of life. The same changes that slow the progression of PAD and relieve your symptoms will also lower your risk of serious complications such as [heart attack](#) and [stroke](#) .

This article lists some things you can do to give yourself the best chance of living well after a diagnosis of PAD.

- [Control your PAD risk factors](#)
 - [Follow your treatment plan](#)
 - [Practice proper foot care](#)
 - [Tips on controlling your symptoms](#)
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Control Your PAD Risk Factors

All women with PAD will need to work with their doctor to get their PAD risk factors under control, which can slow the progression of the disease and prevent future problems, including heart attack and stroke. By making healthy changes and taking medications if necessary, you will experience fewer PAD symptoms and may be able to avoid more invasive treatments to restore blood flow to the leg arteries.

- **Quit smoking.** [Quitting smoking](#) can slow the progression of PAD, prevent amputation, and reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke. There are medications, support groups, and programs to help you stop smoking. Your doctor can also help. See our section on quitting smoking or call 1-800-QUIT-NOW for more information.
- **Work with your doctor to get your blood pressure under control** with lifestyle changes and medications if necessary.

[ACE inhibitor drugs](#)

may be able to prevent heart attack and stroke in women with PAD, even if they do not have [high blood pressure](#)

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[Are ACE inhibitors as effective in African Americans](#)

for more on how your race may affect how well these drugs work.

- **Control high cholesterol.** [Statin drugs](#) can lower [high cholesterol](#) and reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke even if you do not have high cholesterol.
 - **Get regular exercise** – at least 30 minutes a day most days each week. Most women with PAD should also participate in an exercise rehabilitation program, but it is important to keep exercising even after your program ends.
 - If you have [diabetes](#), **control your blood sugar levels**
 - All women with PAD need to practice proper foot care
 - **Maintain a healthy weight**, or lose weight if you are [overweight or obese](#)
 - **Eat a [heart-healthy diet](#)** that includes plenty of fruit, green vegetables, and whole grains, and is low in saturated fat and cholesterol.
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Follow Your Treatment Plan

Many effective treatments are available to relieve your PAD symptoms and prevent heart attack and stroke. By working with your doctor to develop a PAD treatment plan and following it carefully, you will give yourself the best possible chance of living a long, active, and fulfilling life after a diagnosis of PAD.

See [Overview of PAD Treatment](#) to learn about medications, procedures, and exercise training to treat PAD. Make sure to take all your medications exactly as prescribed, and make and keep regular follow-up appointments with your doctor to monitor your progress and check for any problems.

See also: [Tips on Taking Medications](#)

Proper Foot Care

Because PAD causes reduced blood flow in the legs, women with PAD are at risk for skin problems and slow or non-healing sores on the legs and feet. These problems are especially common in women with PAD who also have [diabetes](#). In severe cases, foot or leg wounds can become infected and eventually require amputation. Therefore, it is extremely important for women with PAD to practice proper skin and foot care. Some tips:

- Check your legs and feet every day, including the tops, bottom, and sides of your feet and the backs of your legs. Use a mirror or ask a family member for help checking hard-to-see areas. Look for:

- Cuts or scrapes
- Sores or open wounds
- Redness or swelling
- Tender or painful areas
- Coolness, warmth, or other skin changes
- Corns, calluses, bunions, or blisters
- Ingrown or infected toenails
- Itching, numbness, or tingling

- Call your doctor right away if you notice any leg or foot problems, or have any other [symptoms of PAD](#)

- Do not try to treat them yourself.

- Trim your toenails straight across and file the edges. If you have thick or very hard toenails, you may need your healthcare provider to trim them for you.

- Wash your feet daily with warm (not hot) water and mild soap and dry them thoroughly before getting dressed. Keep your legs and feet well moisturized, but do not use moisturizer between the toes because this can increase the risk of a fungal infection (athlete's foot).

- Always wear comfortable shoes and thick socks that fit well. Avoid shoes or socks that rub your feet, or are tight enough to leave marks on your skin when you take them off. When you get new shoes, break them in gradually, and do not wear them all day.

- Make sure your healthcare provider checks your feet at every office visit. If you have [diabetes](#)

, you should have a foot exam at least once a year, or more often if you already have foot problems.

Tips on Controlling Your Symptoms

PAD symptoms are often worse at night because gravity is not pulling blood down to your legs when you lie down. You may want to consider raising the head of your bed by 4 to 6 inches so your feet are lower than your heart. This improves blood flow to the legs and can reduce nighttime PAD symptoms. Many women with PAD tend to sleep sitting up or with one leg dangling over the side of the bed, but this can cause painful swelling.

Cold temperatures make PAD symptoms worse by causing arteries in your legs and arms to contract to keep body heat in, reducing blood flow to the hands and feet. You can minimize this problem by avoiding going outside in cold weather as much as possible, and by dressing warmly with plenty of layers.

Certain drugs can cause the blood vessels in your legs and arms to constrict (shrink), reducing blood flow to the legs and making PAD symptoms worse. These include caffeine, nicotine, and nasal decongestants to treat colds, allergies, or hay fever. Make sure your doctor knows about all medications you are taking, including over-the-counter medications and herbal or dietary supplements, and ask if there are any you should avoid.

If lifestyle and behavioral changes are not enough, a medication called cilostazol can relieve [PAD symptoms](#) and increase the distance you are able to walk without pain. See [Drugs to Treat Leg Pain](#) to learn more.

For More Information: [Interactive Workbook on Living with PAD](#)

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