

What are CAD and PAD?

Also called coronary heart disease, ischemic heart disease and heart disease.



CAD - narrowing or blockage of the arteries that supply oxygen-rich blood to the heart (coronary arteries). This is usually caused by the buildup of fatty material called plaque (also called atherosclerosis).

PAD - narrowing or blockage of arteries of the arms/hands and/or legs/feet.

Plaque is made up of cholesterol, fatty substances, waste products, calcium and clot-making fibrin. The buildup of plaque causes arteries to narrow and stiffen. When arteries narrow and clog it limits or stops blood flow to the heart. When that happens the heart muscle is not getting enough oxygen and nutrients. This is called ischemia.

Ischemia leads to chest pain (angina). Plaque/Ischemia are risks for a heart attack.

Sources:

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/16898-coronary-artery-disease>
<https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/heart-attack/warning-signs-or-a-heart-attack>
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/peripheral-artery-disease/symptoms-causes/syc-20350557>

Risk Factors for CAD/PAD

- High cholesterol level (especially a high LDL "bad" cholesterol level and a low HDL "good" cholesterol level).
- Family history of heart disease.
- Diagnosis of diabetes.
- Smoking/tobacco/nicotine use.
- Male over 45 years of age or a post-menopausal woman.
- Being overweight.
- Physical inactivity.
- High blood pressure*

*Rates of high blood pressure, obesity, and diabetes are higher in these populations:
African American, Mexican American, Native American, and Asian American.

If you have these risk factors, talk with your healthcare provider. They may want to test you for coronary artery disease.

Symptoms of CAD/PAD

You may not know you have coronary artery disease/peripheral artery disease since you may not have symptoms at first. The buildup of plaque in your arteries takes years to decades. But as your arteries narrow, you may notice mild symptoms that indicate your heart is pumping harder to deliver oxygen-rich blood to your body.

The most common symptoms of CAD are:

Chest pain or shortness of breath, especially after light physical activity like walking up stairs, but it can even happen at rest. Sometimes you won't know you have coronary artery disease until you have a heart attack.

Similar to men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain (angina) or discomfort. However, women are more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

Symptoms of a Heart Attack:

- Chest discomfort - Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes - or it may go away and then return. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.
- Discomfort in other areas of the upper body - Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
- Shortness of breath - This can occur with or without chest discomfort.
- Other signs - Other possible signs include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.

Symptoms of PAD

- Painful cramping in one or both of your hips, thighs or calf muscles after certain activities, such as walking or climbing stairs.
- Leg numbness or weakness.
- Coldness in your lower leg or foot, especially when compared with the other side.
- Sores on your toes, feet or legs that won't heal.
- A change in the color of your legs.
- Hair loss or slower hair growth on your feet and legs.
- Slower growth of your toenails.
- Shiny skin on your legs.
- No pulse or a weak pulse in your legs or feet.
- Erectile dysfunction in men.
- Pain when using your arms, such as aching and cramping when knitting, writing or doing other manual tasks.

As peripheral artery disease gets worse, pain may occur when you're at rest if you are lying down. It may be bad enough to disrupt sleep. Hanging your legs over the edge of your bed or walking around your room may temporarily relieve the pain.

If you have leg pain, numbness or other symptoms, don't dismiss them as a normal part of aging. Call your doctor and make an appointment.