

# Limb ischemia explained

Your blood carries oxygen and nutrients to keep your muscles and tissues healthy. Limb ischemia happens when blood flow to the arms or legs is reduced or blocked. Without enough blood, symptoms like pain, numbness, and slow-healing sores can develop.

## What causes limb ischemia?

Limb ischemia is a form of peripheral artery disease (PAD). PAD happens when fatty buildup, called plaque, narrows the arteries and slows blood flow. This thickening or hardening of the arteries is called atherosclerosis. Over time, the plaque can break open and form a blood clot, which may also block blood flow to the arms or legs.

Other risk factors for limb ischemia can include:

- Chronic kidney disease
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Smoking
- Decreased mobility

## How is limb ischemia diagnosed?

Your doctor may use several methods to determine if you're experiencing limb ischemia, including:

- **Physical exam**
- **Ankle-brachial index (ABI):** Comparing blood pressure in your ankle and arm
- **Ultrasound or Doppler studies:** Checking blood flow in arteries
- **CT or MR angiography:** Looking at detailed imaging of blood vessels
- **Blood tests:** Checking for risk factors like high cholesterol, diabetes, and kidney function



## What are the symptoms of limb ischemia?

Symptoms can include:

- Cold hands, feet, or legs
- Pain or burning in feet or toes
- Aching, cramping, or fatigue in your legs that starts or worsens with exercise and stops with rest, known as claudication
- Numbness or weakness in your hands, feet, or legs
- Weak or no pulse in your legs or feet
- Sores or wounds on your feet or legs that heal slowly or not at all
- Changes in skin color or hair loss on the legs or feet
- Thickening of the toenails

## How is limb ischemia treated?

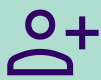
Treating limb ischemia depends on severity and focuses on improving blood flow and preventing complications. Your doctor will create a personalized plan that may include:

**Lifestyle changes:** Quitting smoking, exercising as recommended, eating a heart-healthy diet, and managing your blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar

**Medications:** Taking medicine to prevent clots, reduce blood pressure, and lower cholesterol

### Procedures and surgery:

- **Angioplasty and stenting:** Opens blocked arteries
- **Bypass surgery:** Redirects blood around blocked arteries
- **Limb amputation:** Only if tissue death is severe and other treatments fail



## We are here to help

Your care team can help answer your questions about limb ischemia. Reach out for any support you need.