



# Peripheral Arterial Disease (PAD) and Limb Loss

by NLLIC Staff

Revised 2006



**Peripheral arterial disease (PAD)** is a form of atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) in which fatty substances build up inside the arterial walls and can, over time, create an obstruction that restricts proper blood flow. This may result in blockages to the arteries of the brain, arms, kidneys, and legs.

Diabetes is a major cause of PAD. Because people with diabetes are unable to properly use the sugar they ingest, this sugar builds up and causes changes in their blood vessels that lead to circulation problems. PAD is an important risk factor for chronic foot ulcers that can lead to lower extremity amputation in diabetic patients.

## Frequency

- As many as 10 million people in the United States have PAD.<sup>1</sup>
- In 1996, an estimated 128,588 individuals lost a limb due to PAD. Amputation among people with PAD, which includes many people with diabetes, occurs in 1 in 2,174 people.<sup>2</sup>

## Risks

- People with diabetes are at greater risk for severe PAD and are five times more likely to have an amputation.<sup>3</sup>
- The risk of limb loss due to PAD increases with age. People 65 or older are two to three times more likely to undergo amputation.
- Men with PAD are twice as likely to undergo an amputation as women who have PAD.
- Certain racial and ethnic groups are at increased risk of amputation (i.e., African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans), as they are at increased risk for diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

## Prevention

- To prevent or control the progression of PAD, contact the American Heart Association at [www.americanheart.org/](http://www.americanheart.org/) or the American Diabetes Association at [www.diabetes.org/](http://www.diabetes.org/) for further information regarding these issues. It is important to stop smoking, exercise regularly (see [www.diabetes.org/weightloss-and-exercise/exercise/overview.jsp](http://www.diabetes.org/weightloss-and-exercise/exercise/overview.jsp)), eat a healthful diet based on the Diabetes Food Pyramid (see [www.diabetes.org/nutrition-and-recipes/nutrition/overview.jsp](http://www.diabetes.org/nutrition-and-recipes/nutrition/overview.jsp)), get regular checkups, follow your physician's orders, and work with your healthcare team to manage your PAD.

<sup>1</sup> M.H. Criqui, "Peripheral Arterial Disease—Epidemiological Aspects," *Vascular Medicine* 6 (3 suppl) (2001): 3-7.

<sup>2</sup> B.S. Graves et al, "Trends in Hospital Utilization: United States, 1988-92," National Center for Health Statistics. *Vital Health Statistics* 13:124 (1996).

<sup>3</sup> E.B. Jude et al, "Peripheral Arterial Disease in Diabetic and Nondiabetic Patients," *Diabetes Care* 24 (2001):1433-37.