

## Could Your Leg Pain be a Sign of Vascular Disease?

If you are suffering from chronic pain, aches and fatigue in your legs, it may be a sign that your vascular system is not working well. Peripheral vascular disease—clogged arteries in the periphery or further reaches of your body — is often the cause of leg pain.

Your chances of having peripheral vascular disease are increased if you:

- Smoke
- Are 60 years of age or older
- Have high blood pressure or high cholesterol
- Are overweight
- Are sedentary
- Have diabetes
- Have a family history of atherosclerosis at an early age

Before you can be diagnosed with peripheral vascular disease, your doctor will take a careful history and run tests to rule out other nonvascular conditions that can lead to leg pain, such as arthritis. If it is determined that your leg pain is a result of a narrowing of the arteries in your legs, treatment may include one or more of the following:

**Self-help steps.** If your pain is not severe, your doctor may recommend taking a “wait-and-see” approach, during which he or she may suggest steps to improve an underlying condition.

“When we see patients who exhibit minor symptoms, we do whatever we can to keep them in the stage where they do not need surgery,” said Ibrahim Eid, MD, Vascular Surgeon at Morton Hospital. “We’re very aggressive with controlling cholesterol and encouraging smokers to quit. We also encourage exercise and walking programs. However, if the condition gets worse, we resort to minimally-invasive procedures to help address the issue.”

**Angioplasty.** A tiny balloon is threaded into the artery until the point of blockage and then inflated to clear it out.

**Stents.** Small devices are placed in the artery to keep them from closing again. Stents are frequently used in combination with angioplasty.

**Endarterectomy.** This technique involves removing the blockage.

**Bypass.** Surgeons use some of your own veins and artificial materials to create a detour around the blocked area.

Your veins could also be the culprit of your pain. While tiny spider veins that are visible on the surface of the skin are harmless, varicose veins, which can show under the skin as gnarled clusters, can cause leg pain.

Whether you have varicose veins or are trying to prevent them, here are some suggestions for keeping your legs in good shape:

- Change position. If you sit or stand for long periods of time, it's important to take frequent breaks.
- Uncross your legs. Avoid crossing your legs at the knee or sitting with your legs crossed beneath you. Both postures hamper circulation and encourage blood to pool.
- Exercise regularly. Walking, swimming, biking and other exercises strengthen calf muscles, helping them pump blood upward.
- Shed excess weight. Extra pounds aggravate circulatory problems and contribute to weakened vein valves.
- Put your feet up. At the end of the day, raise your legs so that they're about 12 inches above heart level. This allows the blood to drain from the veins and aids circulation.

Whatever the cause of your leg pain, vascular surgeons offer a variety of surgical and non-surgical treatments for vascular conditions. Dr. Eid and the team of vascular surgeons at Morton Hospital specialize in minimally-invasive procedures for vascular conditions that affect patients' well-being and quality of life, as well as more severe conditions that can be life threatening or lead to the loss of a limb.

For more information about vascular surgery at Morton Hospital and to hear more from Dr. Eid, visit [MortonHospital.org](http://MortonHospital.org). To find a vascular surgeon, call Steward DoctorFinder at 800-488-5959.