

March 2004

Physician Forum

Peripheral Vascular Disease Often Goes Undetected

The effects of peripheral vascular disease can be devastating. At least 12 million Americans have the disease, which can cause people to have difficulty walking, leg pain and, in severe cases, painful foot ulcers, infections and gangrene often leading to amputation. Early intervention can minimize treatments, yet the disease often goes undiagnosed.

Difficult to Diagnose

Symptoms of peripheral vascular disease are difficult to diagnose or are not always present until the blockage is severe. "Some of the symptoms of peripheral vascular disease, such as leg pain, can also be caused by a number of other factors," said Suresh Alankar, M.D. "Vascular disease is not always recognized as the underlying problem."

"Still, there are indicators that physicians can watch for that would suggest a need for further testing and a referral to a specialist," Dr. Alankar said. Those indicators can include:

- Claudication
- Pain in the ball of the foot or the toes
- Ulcers or sores on the foot, ankle or toes that will not heal

Risk Factors

Diabetes is perhaps one of the biggest risk factors. Studies suggest that one in three people with diabetes over age 50 may have peripheral vascular disease or peripheral arterial disease. The American Diabetic Association recommends screening all diabetics at age 50 initially, and repeating the screening every five years.

According to the American Vascular Association, other major risk factors include:

- Hypertension
- Smoking
- High cholesterol
- Family history of vascular disease

Free Screenings for Vascular Disease

The Jewish Hospital Heart and Lung Institute, in association with the American Vascular Association, is offering free screenings for peripheral vascular disease.

The screening will be held at Medical Center East, 3920 Dutchmans Lane, on May 13 from 2 - 6 p.m., and will include:

- Blood pressure
- ABI's
- EKG rhythm strip
- Carotid scan
- Aortic scan

Appointments required.

Call (502) 587-4866.

Diagnostic Testing

An Ankle Brachial Index (ABI) can be used to determine whether a person has peripheral vascular disease. An ABI measures blood pressure in the legs and arm. If there is a significant difference, the person should be referred to a specialist for further testing. The absence of a pulse in the leg would also indicate the need for further testing. Additional tests could include an angiogram.

Treatment

Treatments can vary, depending on the severity of the blockage, and can include angioplasty, placement of a stent and bypass surgery.

To refer a patient for the May 13 vascular screening, please call (502) 587-4866.

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