

Arterial Foot or Leg Ulcer

WHAT IS IT?

Arterial foot and leg ulcers are due to poor blood flow in the arteries caused by blockages that can interfere with the delivery of oxygen to parts of the body, including the skin. This can cause skin breakdown and, unless corrected, can lead to a hard-to-heal wound.

Arterial disease causes calf pain with exercise, when legs are elevated or sometimes even when you are at rest; pain decreases when exercise stops or when legs are below chest level, as when sitting in a chair or standing.

WHAT CAN I DO MYSELF (DIY)?

Arterial blood flow to the legs may be so poor that even a minor injury to the foot or leg may not heal. If the amount of arterial blood getting to the legs is reduced it may actually cause a wound, most often to the toe tips. You may be able to improve or even restore arterial blood flow by doing one or all of the following:

- quit smoking
- lower your cholesterol
- exercise as much as you are able

THE KEY RULE

Arterial blood flow to the legs can be improved through lifestyle changes and/or surgery.



Exercise such as walking to the point of pain five to six times a day can increase the flow to the small arteries, improving blood flow to your leg. If these methods don't work, you may need to make an appointment with your doctor.

WHEN DO I CALL IN A PRO?

If your calves still hurt when exercising, when your legs are elevated, or even at rest, see your family doctor to discuss medications or get referrals to a vascular surgeon, dietitian and quit-smoking programs.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Another set of free resources, called the [Care at Home series](#), may also be of interest to you.