# Stair-Climbing and Peripheral Artery Disease

The feeling of weakness in the legs isn't unusual when you've been exercising, been on your feet all day, or when you're under the weather. However, if you’ve recently noticed this feeling of weakness while climbing stairs, then it could indicate an underlying condition.

## What is Peripheral Artery Disease?

[Peripheral artery disease](https://www.usavascularcenters.com/what-is-pad/), also known as PAD, is a common condition affecting8 to 12 million people in the United States. PAD is a vascular disease in which the arteries narrow due to plaque buildup, which reduces the amount of blood flow that successfully reaches the lower extremities.

## Poor Blood Circulation

Vascular diseases like PAD, or other conditions that affect blood circulation in your body, can cause leg weakness while climbing stairs. PAD and deep vein thrombosis (DVT) are two conditions that may make exercising, daily activities, and climbing stairs close to impossible. DVT occurs when a blood clot develops in a deep vein within the legs. Both PAD and DVT can be managed and treated, but can also become life-threatening if not addressed.

Claudication is a term that is often associated with PAD. This is usually used to describe a chronic pain in the legs caused by decreased blood flow. Pain caused by claudication can range from a dull, aching pain to severe cramp-like stabs in the buttocks, thighs, or calves.

## Difficulty Climbing Stairs

Because PAD is a progressive disease, symptoms tend to get worse over time. One symptom of PAD is difficulty climbing stairs, which can severely reduce mobility. The decrease in circulation within the lower extremities can cause legs to feel heavy or fatigued. The sensation of physical heaviness can make lifting your legs to climb stairs close to impossible.

When you are at rest, PAD symptoms tend to reduce or stop completely. Many people who have symptomatic PAD refrain from exercising or moving around because this feeling of fatigue or heaviness deters them from being active.

## Why Conditions Like PAD and DVT Are Often Ignored

These two vascular conditions are [often ignored](https://www.usavascularcenters.com/research-suggests-widespread-lack-p-d-awareness/) because many people typically attribute their symptoms to [aging](https://www.usavascularcenters.com/peripheral-artery-disease-isnt-just-sign-aging/). When people aren’t able to exercise without pain, they think getting older is to blame rather than a sign of something more. A common misconception is that leg pain is [associated with arthritis.](https://www.usavascularcenters.com/arthritis-peripheral-artery-disease-pad/) Unlike arthritis, the cramping is typically focused on the muscle area, not joints.

Another reason why these two conditions are left untreated is because they don’t always exhibit symptoms. Many people don’t realize they have PAD or DVT until they are in the later stages, when the blood clots detach or plaque buildup clogs the entire artery. It’s important to manage high blood pressure and cholesterol, adopt healthy eating and exercise habits, as well as get checked for venous insufficiency and plaque buildup if you have a family history of these two conditions.

It’s essential to diagnose and treat vascular diseases like PAD [as early as possible](https://www.usavascularcenters.com/many-pad-cases-go-undiagnosed/). It’s important to note that PAD can lead to serious health concerns like stroke, heart attacks, and even amputation.

## Next Steps

If you have difficulty climbing stairs or experience leg, thigh, calf, or buttocks pain, schedule an appointment with our vascular specialists to determine if PAD could be the reason. Our vascular specialists will use various tests such as an [Ankle-Brachial Index (ABI) test](https://www.usavascularcenters.com/ankle-brachial-index-abi-test/), a physical examine of your leg for [non-healing wounds](https://www.usavascularcenters.com/non-healing-wound-matters-vascular-health/) or cooler temperature in one leg, an angiography, or an ultrasound.

Don’t wait for your symptoms to worsen. Give us a call at **888-773-2193** or schedule your appointment online.

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