Getting to the Heart of Circulatory Health

CIRCULATORY HEALTH INVOLVES TAKING GOOD CARE OF YOUR HEART AND YOUR BLOOD VESSELS – because the two are literally intertwined. Your circulatory system uses the heart to pump blood, oxygen and nutrients throughout the body via a network of blood vessels.

"If you're seeing a cardiologist because you have heart disease, then it's important to think about your vascular health as well," says vascular surgeon Marissa Famularo, DO, with LVPG Vascular Surgery.

Learn more about the warning signs and steps you can take to make a big difference in your circulatory health.

What are the signs of vascular disease?

A common sign of vascular disease is claudication – pain in your legs during physical activity that stops when you rest. Foot wounds that won't heal are another more serious symptom of limited blood flow to your legs and feet.

What is peripheral arterial disease (PAD)?

PAD occurs when there's a blockage in the arteries, usually in the legs, that reduces blood flow. "Plaque buildup doesn't just affect the arteries in your heart, it affects the arteries in your whole body," Dr. Famularo says.

It's estimated that globally 113 million people over age 40 suffer from PAD. Sometimes it's simply caused by genetics, but other common risk factors include:

- Smoking
- High blood pressure
- Atherosclerosis
- Diabetes
- High cholesterol
- Being over age 60

What are some tips to improve your vascular health?

- **Take advantage of smoking-cessation resources.** Quitting smoking is one of the most important things you can do. "Many of my patients who quit smoking, including long-time smokers, often see an immediate improvement in how far they can walk without having pain," Dr. Famularo says.
- **Check your feet every day.** If you have PAD, heart disease or diabetes, check your feet daily for any cuts, wounds or blisters so you can stay on top of it before it becomes a bigger problem.
- **Do more physical exercise.** Surprisingly, walking more actually helps with pain during walking. "You want to teach your body to build up the collateral vessels, which are like side streets to get the blood where it needs to go," Dr. Famularo says.
- **Keep your cholesterol in check.** Talk with your doctor or clinician about how to keep your cholesterol under the recommended limits, which may involve taking medication.

If PAD becomes more serious or problematic, there are a variety of interventions that can help, ranging from ultrasound monitoring and minimally invasive procedures involving stents and balloons to medications and surgery, if needed.

Marissa Famularo, DO
Vascular surgery

Learn more about your vascular health at **LVHN.org/vascular**