

Poor Circulation in Your Legs and Feet

Information for patients



Podiatry Department

What does it mean if I have poor circulation?

If you have been told that you have poor circulation in your legs and feet, it means that the blood supply isn't getting to your feet as well as it should do. This might be because your heart isn't able to pump the blood around your body very easily, or it might be because the blood vessels have become narrowed or blocked, stopping the blood from travelling through them easily.

It is important to look after your feet carefully to avoid any problems such as:

- Swollen feet
- Chilblains
- Fragile skin which can easily break down into wounds and ulcers of the skin and become infected
- Difficulty healing
- Gangrene and amputation.

What causes poor circulation to my legs and feet?

Our circulation naturally declines over time, but there are other reasons why this might happen. Some examples include:

- Smoking
- Being overweight
- Lack of exercise
- High blood pressure
- Some health conditions, such as diabetes and stroke
- Some medications and treatments, such as chemotherapy.

Signs and symptoms

Some common symptoms of poor circulation include:

- Swollen feet or ankles
- Cold feet
- Hair loss from toes and legs

- Wounds or ulcers on your feet and legs that do not heal
- Changing skin colour on your legs, such as turning pale or blue
- Numbness or weakness in your feet and legs
- Pain in your leg when resting
- Pain in the back of your leg when walking a short distance, which is relieved with stopping.

What can I do to help myself?

- Stop smoking
- Gradually increase your physical activity
- Wear compression stockings if you have been advised to do so
- Check your feet daily for redness, cuts, or injuries
- Wash your feet daily, but avoid soaking them
- Dry your feet well, especially between your toes
- Keep your feet warm during cold weather
- Wear cotton or wool socks. These are better than nylon tights or synthetic materials at keeping your feet warm
- Wear your socks inside out so seams do not rub your skin
- Avoid walking barefoot
- Make sure your shoes fit well. There should be half an inch of space between the tip of your longest toe and the end of your shoe. The shoe should also be deep enough so that it doesn't feel tight on the tops of your toes. If your feet swell, opt for shoes with laces or Velcro which can be adjusted throughout the day
- Apply moisturiser to your feet regularly, but be careful not to put it between your toes as it can make the skin there fragile
- Don't use sharp tools to treat your feet. It's safer to file your nails regularly than to cut them. Corn plasters which contain acid can also cause wounds on your skin so they should be avoided

- Don't use direct heat, such as hot water bottles or fires, to warm your feet or legs
- When you are sitting, try putting your feet up to elevate them.

When to seek help

You should contact your GP if you have symptoms of poor circulation. They may need to do further tests or change your medications. They might refer you to other services for further assessment or treatment such as the Vascular Clinic or the Podiatry Department.

If you have a wound or infection of your foot, you should contact the Podiatry Department urgently. Existing patients should call on the numbers below.

If you are not yet a patient of the Podiatry Department you can self-refer by asking for a self-referral form from your GP reception or by downloading one from our website:

<https://weare.nhslothian.scot/podiatry/access-to-the-service/>

It's important to give as much information as you can when contacting us and completing the referral form. This will help us to prioritise you. If you are housebound, please ask your GP to refer you urgently.

Podiatry Department – 0131 536 1627

Patients who are housebound, reside in a nursing home or hospital ward – 0131 446 4631

If you notice redness moving from the toe towards the top of the foot or leg, are feeling sick, shaking or have a high temperature these may be signs of sepsis. You should contact NHS 24 for urgent advice by dialling 111.