



## What is Arterial Disease?

Your arteries carry blood and oxygen throughout your body. In arterial disease (arteriosclerosis), arteries become narrowed or blocked. When this happens, the body is unable to carry enough blood to the farthest point of your extremities— fingers and toes. In more severe cases, the entirety of the lower legs can be affected. Sometimes, the body will form smaller arteries to go around these blockages but even these can become blocked. When tissues receive insufficient blood flow and oxygen, skin begins to breakdown causing an ulcer. An arterial ulcer will have well-defined edges and a circular shape. Feet may feel cool to the touch and the skin on your legs may be shiny with no hair growth. Pulses are often weak or absent and the toenails are thickened.

## What to Look For

- Pain when walking
- Pain when at rest or during sleep
- Numbness or tingling
- Skin appearing shiny or cool to touch
- Limited or no hair growth
- Pale color to leg or feet when elevated
- Red or bluish color when feet are dangling
- Wounds that will not heal
- Toes that turn black

## What You Can Do

- Stop or decrease smoking— nicotine in any form causes arteries to constrict, decreasing blood flow
- Atherosclerosis may be decreased with proper diet— reducing cholesterol and saturated fats will help lower risk
- High blood pressure creates additional work for the heart and placed more stress on the arteries
- Diabetics are more prone to atherosclerosis— it is recommended that you follow you physician's instructions for glycemic control, diet and exercise
- Regular daily exercise often assists in control of atherosclerosis

# PATIENT GUIDE TO ARTERIOSCLEROSIS

## Daily Foot Care

When blood flow to the lower extremities is decreased, a minor injury can easily develop into a serious problem. Small injuries to feet and toes may result in serious infections and/or tissue death (gangrene). Here are some steps to follow:

- Avoid situations that may lead to injury
- Always wear shoes– never go barefoot
- Avoid extreme heat and cold and any strong chemicals
- Wash and dry your feet daily– do not soak
- Wear any new shoes for short periods of time to break in
- Inspect all shoes before wear for any foreign objects
- Inspect feet daily and use a mirror if necessary– this is especially important for those with diabetes or decreased feeling
- Cut toenails straight across and no shorter than the length of the toe– corners may be rounded with a file
- DO NOT trim calluses, corns, or bunions– always see a physician

## When Should I Have Someone Look at My Wounds?

If you are suffering from the symptoms of arteriosclerosis, you may benefit from the advice of a professional trained in the care of this specific disease.

- Do you have a wound that you are unsure of how it occurred?
- Do any of your toes appear purple or black?
- Has your wound not shown significant signs of healing after 5 to 7 days?
- Does a wound keep coming back in the same location?
- Are you experiencing pain when walking or at rest?

If you have experienced any of the above, please contact your healthcare provider or one of ProCare's wound care clinics.