

Vascular Services

Complete Offerings in

Vascular disease harms your blood circulation in arteries and veins throughout your body. Coronary artery disease, for example, is simply vascular disease of the arteries to the heart. Many people are unaware that vascular disease attacks other critical arteries, such as the aorta (the main artery from your heart to the entire body), the carotid arteries (the main arteries to the head), the blood circulation to the legs and arms (peripheral arteries) and the renal (kidney) arteries.

Vascular disease can be categorized into three types of problems: atherosclerosis (also known as hardening of the arteries or circulatory disease), venous disease and aneurysms.

Arteries carry blood from your heart and lungs to the rest of your body with a fresh supply of oxygen. Atherosclerosis is caused by narrowing of the arteries due to a build up of plaque or fat on the artery wall. If narrowing is in the arteries leading to the head (the carotid arteries), the result can be a stroke. If narrowing is in arteries delivering blood to the kidneys, kidney problems may develop. If narrowing is in arteries to the arms or legs, pain swelling and/or unhealing sores may result. If not diagnosed early, progressive disease may result in the need for amputation.

Veins carry blood from your body back to your heart to be recirculated. Vein disorders occur when one-way valves don't close completely and blood flows in both directions through the veins. This results in an accumulation of fluids in the legs or arms and causes swelling. Varicose veins and spider veins can occur because of such

swelling. Blood clots also can occur in veins and are usually caused by long bed rest, pregnancy, hormone changes or damage to veins.

An aneurysm is an abnormal bulge and weakening in the wall of any blood vessel. It often occurs in the aorta, which is the main artery of the chest and abdomen. The aorta carries blood flow from the heart to all the vital organs and limbs, including the legs and feet. When an aortic aneurysm bursts, a patient's life can be in danger.

Risk Factors for Vascular Disease

- Cigarette smoking is the No. 1 risk factor for developing vascular disease
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Family history of atherosclerosis (fat buildup in arteries; history of coronary artery disease or carotid artery disease)
- High levels of cholesterol and other blood fats
- High blood pressure
- High-stress lifestyle
- Older than 50
- Sedentary life style

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Vascular Services, *continued*

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Signs and Symptoms

The following are some signs of vascular disease:

Arterial Disease in Legs and Feet

- Leg pain when walking or exercising
- Leg swelling
- Weakness or tiredness in the legs
- Sores on feet or legs that do not heal

Arterial Disease in the Carotid Arteries of the Neck

- Temporary loss of vision in one eye, or blurred or double vision
- Numbness or weakness on one side of the body
- Slurred speech or difficulty speaking
- History of stroke

Vein Disorders

- Leg swelling
- Sores on lower legs that do not heal
- Leg pain
- Varicose veins

Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm

- Often no symptoms
- Dizziness
- Sudden onset of abdominal or back pain

What Our Team Can Do for You

The UVa Heart and Vascular Center's approach to vascular disease is to use teams of cardiologists, surgeons and interventional radiologists, who work together to coordinate and manage each patient's care. We use a "one-stop" approach in both outpatient and inpatient settings so patients can get the

answers they want and all of the care they need in one place. Our staff dedicates itself to educating patients about their disease and managing and modifying their risk factors with smoking cessation techniques, dietary education and education to keep diabetes and blood pressure under control. Our inpatient Vascular Services Care Unit, the first in Virginia, manages all types of vascular disorders.

Each year, UVa vascular surgeons perform more than 4,500 vascular studies and 700 major vascular operations. Our vascular surgeons have completed five years of surgical training plus one or two years of fellowship training.

We work carefully to diagnose problems with blood vessels. We use a variety of noninvasive diagnostic tools to determine your exact condition and the most effective treatment methods, including state-of-the-art ultrasound and radiology imaging tools.

Once we know your condition, we may treat you simply with diet and exercise programs. We can treat some conditions with drug therapy. Others may require minimally invasive techniques such as angioplasty (opening vessels with a balloonlike device) or stenting (inserting a metal device to hold arteries open). We also have expert surgeons who can perform limb-saving surgeries, aneurysm repairs, laser treatment for varicose and spider veins and other more complex procedures.

If you think you have a problem related to your blood vessels, please contact your physician or call our center: 434-924-DOCS