

Intermittent Claudication and Exercise

What is Intermittent Claudication?

Intermittent claudication describes the pain that develops in the muscles of the legs when taking exercise, such as walking.

Commonly, the calf muscles are the most affected, and patients describe a cramping discomfort, as characteristic of the pain.

Initially patients may be able to walk through the pain, but as the disease progresses further, this is not possible and the claudication pain causes limping and can only be relieved by resting.

What causes the leg pain?

Pain develops because there is a narrowing or blockage in the main artery taking blood to the leg due to hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis).

Over the years cholesterol and calcium build up inside the arteries.

This occurs much earlier in people who smoke and those who have diabetes or high levels of cholesterol in the blood.

How can I help my intermittent claudication?

The most important things you can do which may help are to:

- **Stop smoking**
- **Take regular exercise**
- **Lose weight**
- **Control blood sugars if you have diabetes**
- **Take medication prescribed by your doctor**

These steps can improve your walking and reduce the lower limb pain.

How can exercise help me?

There is good scientific evidence, that patients with intermittent claudication, who take regular exercise, can increase their walking distance. That is the distance that they can walk before they have to stop because of pain in their leg muscles.

Green Prescriptions

- To develop improvements in the distance you walk, you will be referred to the Green Prescription programme.
- As part of the Green Prescription programme you will receive a phone call once a month for three months, from a Green Prescription Support Person. This is to offer encouragement and support as you set out on the 'Progressive Walking Guide'

The Progressive Walking Guide

- It is important to set aside time each day to go for a walk.
- Follow the 'Progressive Walking Guide', and increase your exercise every week.
- Walk at an easy pace until the pain comes on and then try to push on a little further. When the pain increases to near maximum, stop and rest until the pain disappears, and then return to the easy pace where you started.
- It is important to only increase the distance walked each week by a small amount otherwise it will become too difficult.

How soon can I expect any improvements?

Initially this can be uncomfortable but you should start to feel real benefit at about 6-8 weeks. It is important not to try and increase your walking distance too rapidly as this can become painful and frustrating.

Resources to help you achieve your goals

Green Prescription *0800 ACTIVE*

Smoking Cessation *0800 778 778*

Diabetes Lifestyle Centre *09 4304101 ex 8667*

Your family doctor and nurse

Ready to go?



Remember...

Human beings were made to walk

Make it a habit

Keep it interesting

Take a friend

Join a group

Be patient

Walk tall

BECOME SMOKE FREE

Call the Quitline

0800 778 778

Northland Health

Medical Outpatients
Whangarei Hospital
Maunu Road

Phone: (09) 430 4101 ex 7710

NORTHLAND DISTRICT HEALTH BOARD
Te Poari Hauora Ā Rohe O Te Tai Tokerau



Intermittent Claudication and Exercise



**Medical Outpatients
Department
Whangarei Hospital**

Phone: 09 430 4101 ex 7710