



# BUERGER'S DISEASE

(Thromboangiitis Obliterans)



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

Blockage of small and medium arteries due to inflammation of blood vessels. The symptoms come on gradually over a period of time. The disease is most common in men between ages 20 and 40 who are heavy cigarette smokers. However, it is now being diagnosed more in women and people of both genders over age 50.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Numbness and tingling in the legs, feet, arms, and fingers.
- Pain in the feet and legs while walking or during exercise. This pain occurs less often in the hands and fingers. Pain comes from not having enough blood flow to these areas of the body. Pain becomes persistent as disease progresses.
- Raynaud's phenomenon. A condition where the hands, fingers, feet, and toes turn white, blue, or red when exposed to cold.
- Painful sores (ulcers) and gangrene (dead tissue) on the toes and fingertips.

### CAUSES

Unknown. The disease is probably triggered by smoking combined with an immune reaction in the body. Most patients are heavy smokers, but some are moderate smokers, and some use smokeless tobacco.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

Smoking or using smokeless tobacco.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

There are no specific preventive measures, except never to smoke.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

This condition is currently considered incurable. Stopping smoking is the only effective treatment to stop the progress of the disease.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Blood clots in the legs.
- Finger and toe ulcers, gangrene, and amputation.
- Life expectancy is shorter.



## DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask questions about your symptoms and smoking history. This is often enough to make the diagnosis. Medical tests may be done to confirm the diagnosis and check for complications.
- There is no effective drug or specific treatment for the disorder.
- Get treatment for any infection or injury that occurs.
- The disease will get worse if smoking continues, so stop smoking. Join a program to help you stop.
- Avoid exposure to the cold if possible. Cold causes blood vessels to constrict. This deprives your body of a normal blood supply. If you are going out in cold weather, wear warm footwear and gloves.
- Clip nails carefully to avoid injuring the skin.
- Wear shoes that fit well. Wear cotton or wool socks.
- Insert soft pads in your shoes to protect your feet.
- Don't go barefoot outdoors.
- If gangrene develops, amputation of the affected limb, toes, or fingers is likely.
- Counseling may be recommended to help with lifestyle changes required to cope with the disease.

### MEDICATIONS

Drugs that open the blood vessels may be prescribed. These drugs will not help if you continue smoking.

### ACTIVITY

Stay as active as you can. Begin an exercise program to become as physically fit as possible.

### DIET

No special diet.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of Buerger's disease.
- You have pain that cannot be controlled.
- Sores develop on your fingers or toes.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.

