



Information for patients with intermittent claudication symptoms

Supervised exercise programme (SEP)

What is intermittent claudication?

Intermittent claudication pain is one of the first symptoms of peripheral arterial disease (PAD). It is caused by a narrowing or a blockage of one of the arteries taking blood to your leg, reducing the flow of blood it gets. At rest your leg is getting enough blood flow, but when you start to walk, your body cannot supply enough blood to the muscles to provide the oxygen it requires to sustain the activity. This results in a cramping, aching, tightness or a pain in your leg.

The symptoms quickly resolve once you have stopped walking for a few minutes and the oxygen demand has reduced.

Although there is no cure for PAD, moderate exercise has been proven to improve intermittent claudication symptoms. Exercise encourages smaller arteries in the leg to enlarge and help manage the blood flow when there is more demand. For example when you walk, which is known as collateral circulation.

Why a supervised exercise programme (SEP)?

Research has shown that participating in supervised exercise is more effective in improving your symptoms than just giving you advice to exercise (unsupervised) and improves your quality of life. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is the governing body that provides the NHS with clinical practice recommendations. As a first-line treatment for your diagnosis of intermittent claudication, NICE recommends that you have the chance to take part in a supervised exercise programme.

What is a supervised exercise programme (SEP)?

In brief, a SEP is an organised programme where you will participate in structured exercise classes. These are delivered by a qualified exercise instructor over a specified time frame. For example they could be walking or strengthening exercises.

Assessment

Before starting your SEP, you will be invited to attend a face-to-face appointment with a vascular specialist nurse who will take some basic measurements which are explained below. You should allow two hours for this assessment.

You will be asked to complete a consent form in order to participate in the SEP.

These are the basic measurements that the nurse will take:

- A pressure, similar to taking your blood pressure in your arm, will be taken on both legs. This measurement is a way to assess the degree of arterial disease in your legs. It can give an indication of the amount of blood flow to your feet. This is called an Ankle Brachial Index (ABPI).
- Using a quality-of-life questionnaire, the nurse will also ask a few questions about your symptoms and how they affect your daily life.
- You will then be asked to walk on a treadmill to assess your baseline pain-free and maximum walking distance.

This assessment will take place at York St John University, Lord Mayor's Walk site. Directions and parking instructions are available at the end of this booklet.

Your supervised exercise programme

The programme is free and will run over 12 weeks with two sessions per week. The days and times of the sessions will be confirmed when you speak to the SEP team.

The classes are group-based, with a maximum of ten participants (mixed gender) per session.

At each session, there will be a warm-up followed by shuttle walking. Shuttle means walking as far as possible in six-minute blocks, at a speed that causes you to have claudication symptoms and trying to walk through the pain. This is repeated five times. The class ends with a cool down.

The sessions are held at York St John's University, Haxby Road site Sports Barn. There is an onsite café serving drinks and snacks.

Directions and parking instructions are available at the end of this booklet.

Please arrive on time to allow the class to start promptly.

What happens after the exercise programme?

If you complete the programme, you will be invited to attend a similar assessment to the one you undertook before starting the SEP. This will compare your pre- and post measurements.

Whether or not you completed the entire 12-week programme (if your symptoms remain the same or are worse) you can be referred back to the vascular consultant clinic to discuss any alternate treatment options.

If your symptoms have improved and you are satisfied with the outcome, we will write to your GP and discharge you from the SEP. A telephone follow-up will be arranged in six to eight weeks with the vascular specialist nurses to provide you with support and advice.

What can I do to help myself?

Stopping smoking is the most important thing you can do to prevent your disease from getting worse and reduce your risk of heart attack or stroke. These are some of the available stop smoking services:

- Call the free National Smokefree Helpline on 0300 123 1044 (England only). Talk to a trained adviser for advice and support.
- Or access help via the internet:

www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/

- Or join through social media by joining the [Quit Smoking Support Group on Facebook](#)
- Further support is available by downloading the free NHS Quit Smoking app on the Google Play Store and Apple App Store.
- York City council health trainers, a free stop-smoking service are available on 01904 553377.

Alternatively, speak to your GP about local stop-smoking services.

Keep Active

The other important thing you can do to help is to start or increase exercise. The Circulation Foundation has developed the following information (infographic) that might help you try to exercise (page 5). More information about exercise and intermittent claudication from the Circulation Foundation is available online at: www.circulationfoundation.org.uk or you can ask the vascular nurse for a paper copy.

Exercises for Intermittent Claudication

For further information please view the infographic image on the next page or visit [Exercise for Claudication Infographic - 2019 - FINAL.pdf](#) (circulationfoundation.org.uk).

Exercise for Intermittent Claudication

What is intermittent claudication?

- Leg muscle pain or discomfort during walking
- Usually caused by narrowed arteries



NICE National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

RECOMMENDS EXERCISE

Supervised exercise classes produce the greatest benefits - ask your doctor or specialist if these are available locally

Benefits of exercise

- Reduces pain
- Reduces the need for vascular procedures
- Improves heart and vascular health
- Improves mood
- Improves sleep
- Maintains healthy weight

Key recommendations

- Aim to complete 30-60 minutes of walking per session
- Follow the walk-rest-walk pattern (central diagram)
- 3-5 sessions per week

Walk regularly for exercise

some is good, more is better, make it a habit

Rest until the pain subsides then walk again

Continue until moderate-to-strong leg pain develops

Walk at a speed that you can maintain for 3-10 minutes

to reduce pain and improve fitness

Further guidance

- Do not fear walking with leg pain - it will not harm you
- Build up gradually - your walking speed and time
- Be patient - it usually takes several weeks of exercise to improve symptoms

General tips

- Wear comfortable clothing, keep hydrated
- Choose routes with resting places
- Build in variety, involve others, keep it fun
- Do not exercise if you are unwell
- Seek medical advice if you experience chest pain, dizziness or sickness

Do strengthening and balance activities as well



... on at least 2 days per week
... to stay strong and reduce the risk of falling

Where can I find out more information about this condition?

The Circulation Foundation: www.circulationfoundation.org.uk

Source:

Based on the BASES Expert Statement by Tew, Harwood, Ingle, et al. in The Sport and Exercise Scientist, Issue 57 (Autumn 2018), https://www.bases.org.uk/images/autumn_2018_7601_bas_expert_statement_v2_569.pdf

Disclaimer:

This infographic is not a validated clinical decision aid. Any reliance placed on this information is strictly at the user's own risk.

Thanks:

To the reviewers who helped to produce this infographic, which was co-funded by The Circulation Foundation and Northumbria University.



Take the right medication

Your consultant will have discussed with you whether certain medications are appropriate for you. They will also tell your GP. These normally include a blood thinning tablet and a cholesterol tablet. A combination of these tablets are known to prevent the risk of cardiovascular complications including heart attack or stroke in the future.

Your GP will manage other risk factor medication including diabetes and blood pressure tablets. The nurse at your assessment can discuss these medications with you if you wish.

Other lifestyle considerations:

1. Healthy balanced diet.
2. Lose weight if you are overweight or obese.

York St John University directions and parking Lord Mayor's Walk Site- assessment site

York St John University, Lord Mayor's Walk, York, YO31 7EX

The campus is located to the north of York City Centre. It can be accessed from the south by the A19, from the east by the A1036. From the north it can be accessed by Haxby Road or Huntingdon Road.

The Lord Mayor's Walk Site has Automated Number Plate Recognition (ANPR). The vascular nurse will ask for your car registration in advance of your assessment to allow you to park without incurring any fee. There is Blue Badge parking at this site but there are designated parking spaces available for the assessment.

Parking arrangements will be sent to you with your appointment date.

First bus routes 1,5,5A and 6 stop at Clarence Street bus stop close to the assessment site.

Building location

The vascular nurse will arrange to meet you at the parking location sent with your appointment. The building where your assessment will take place is the Foss building, coded FS.

Haxby Road- SEP site

York St John University Sports Fields, Haxby Road, New Earswick, York, YO31 8TA.

The Sports Park is located off Haxby Road to the north east of the York City Centre. Haxby Road links the City Centre with the A1237 Outer Ring Road to the north.

Haxby Road Sports Park has a large car park with Automated Number Plate Recognition (ANPR). On arrival use the screen in the main reception to log your car registration plate, which will allow four hours of free parking. The exercise instructor can assist with this if required. This must be completed on each visit to the facility upon arrival.

The car park has Blue Badge parking available near to the entrance, you will still need to register your car registration plate on arrival if you park in one of these.

First Bus service number 1 provides the closest bus stop for Haxby road-SEP site. The number 1 service runs between Wigginton and Chapelfields. Traveling towards town the stop is Foss Park. Traveling out of town towards Wiggington, the closest stops are either Bowling Green or Mille Crux.

Building location

The reception point is located just inside the main entrance. On your first session one of the team will meet you at the reception to direct you to room for your exercise programme.

① If you have further concerns about your condition, please contact your GP. If you are not sure what to do, call 111 or get help from 111 online:
<https://111.nhs.uk/> When to use NHS 111 - NHS (www.nhs.uk)

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email
yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website: www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/

Date this version published June 2025
Review Date June 2027
Document Reference PIL1618 v3, Supervised Exercise Programme (SEP)
© 2025 York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. All Rights reserved.