

Veterans more likely to suffer from peripheral artery disease, study finds

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People who have served in the Armed Forces are more likely to suffer from peripheral arterial disease—clogged arteries in their legs—than people who have never been in the military, according to a study by the University of Glasgow.

Peripheral arterial disease causes pain in the legs on walking due to reduced circulation, and can lead to progressive disability, amputation and increased risk of death from [heart attack](#) and stroke, but [public awareness](#) of the disease is low. Smoking is the biggest preventable cause. Research in the United States has shown that in the long term, it is a bigger cause of [limb amputation](#) in veterans than war injury.

Researchers at the University of Glasgow looked at 57,000 veterans in Scotland who were born between 1945 and 1985 and who had a wide range of experience and lengths of service in the Armed Forces over a 50-year period. They found that veterans had a 45% increased risk of peripheral arterial disease compared with people who had never served, but this rose to 80% if they were born in the 1950s and left service prematurely. People with over 12 years' service were at no greater risk than the general population.

Lead researcher Dr. Beverly Bergman said: "This is an important study which shows that veterans may be at increased risk of amputation later in life as a result of this common but poorly-recognised smoking-related disease. The [increased risk](#) in older people who have only served for a short time is likely to reflect their high rate of smoking. It is never too

late to stop smoking, control weight and take exercise, all of which can help to reduce the risk."

The study, which used data from the Scottish Veterans Health Study to examine rates of hospitalisation and death as a result of [peripheral arterial disease](#), is published in the *Journal of Public Health*.

More information: B P Bergman et al. Peripheral arterial disease in Scottish military veterans: a retrospective cohort study of 57 000 veterans and 173 000 matched non-veterans, *Journal of Public Health* (2018). [DOI: 10.1093/pubmed/fdy046](https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdy046)

Provided by University of Glasgow

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