

Society for Vascular Surgery Raises Awareness of PAD-Related Limb Loss During Shark Week

25 unprovoked shark attacks occurred in the U.S. in 2025; vascular surgeons call attention to a disease that contributes to 400 limbs lost every day.

ROSEMONT, IL, UNITED STATES, July 30, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Limb loss from any cause is traumatic and life-altering. During Shark Week, the Society for Vascular Surgery (SVS) is urging Americans to learn about peripheral artery disease (PAD), a common but underrecognized, condition that can threaten limbs when it goes undiagnosed or untreated.

While shark attacks are widely associated with the risk of limb loss, 68% of Americans have never heard of PAD—a leading cause of nontraumatic lower-limb amputation in the United States.

An estimated 8 to 12 million Americans are living with PAD. The condition contributes to approximately 400 amputations every day in the United States, yet many people remain unfamiliar with its risk factors, warning signs, prevention strategies and treatment options until the disease has progressed to a medical emergency.

"PAD often progresses quietly, and too many people do not recognize the warning signs until the disease has become limb-threatening," said Linda Harris, MD, SVS president and a vascular surgeon in Buffalo, New York. "If you have leg pain while walking, a wound that is not healing or risk factors such as smoking or diabetes, talk to your doctor about whether you should be evaluated for PAD."

What is PAD?

PAD is a chronic condition in which plaque builds up in the arteries that carry blood to the legs. Over time, this buildup can narrow the arteries and partially or completely block blood flow.

When blood flow is restricted, the muscles and tissues in the legs do not receive enough oxygen, glucose and other essential nutrients. Left untreated, PAD can lead to serious complications, including amputation and death.

Who is at Risk?

PAD is more common among people age 65 and older but can occur at nearly any age. Risk

factors include smoking, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, kidney disease and a family history of PAD.

What are the Symptoms?

- Pain, cramping or tiredness in the legs (calves, thighs or buttocks) or arms when walking or exercising that improves with rest.
- Pain in the feet or legs while resting, particularly at night.
- Sores on the feet that do not heal.
- One lower leg or foot feeling colder than the other

Some people with PAD experience few or no noticeable symptoms. Anyone experiencing possible symptoms should talk with their doctor about their risk factors and whether further evaluation or a referral to a vascular surgeon may be appropriate.

Who Treats PAD?

Vascular surgeons are the only specialists trained to diagnose and treat the full spectrum of vascular disease. They can provide treatments, including medication, minimally invasive procedures and, if needed, open surgery.

“We never want to meet a patient for the first time in the operating room,” said William Shutze, MD, SVS Vice-President and vascular surgeon in Dallas, TX. “There are many steps we can take before PAD becomes an emergency. Recognizing the signs and seeking care early gives patients more options and may help prevent the need for an amputation.”

What can you do to prevent and treat PAD?

You can reduce your risk of PAD—or help keep it from progressing—by not smoking, staying physically active and managing conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

Walking and structured exercise can play an important role in PAD prevention and treatment. For people already diagnosed with PAD, a supervised exercise program may improve walking ability, reduce symptoms and support overall vascular health.

This call for greater awareness comes ahead of PAD Awareness Month in September. As the U.S. population ages and the number of people at risk for vascular disease grows, recognizing PAD earlier will be critical to protecting mobility, preventing avoidable amputations and helping patients receive appropriate care before the condition becomes an emergency.

Learn more about Peripheral Artery Disease at YourVascularHealth.org.

About the Society for Vascular Surgery

The [Society for Vascular Surgery® \(SVS\)](https://www.vascular.org/) seeks to advance excellence and innovation in vascular health through education, advocacy, research, and public awareness. The organization was founded in 1946 and currently has a membership of approximately 6,300. SVS membership is recognized in the vascular community as a mark of professional achievement. For more information, visit [Vascular.org](https://www.vascular.org/).

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