

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Final Recommendation Statement on Screening for Peripheral Artery Disease and Assessing Cardiovascular Risk with the Ankle Brachial Index

WASHINGTON, D.C. – September 3, 2013 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today released its final recommendation statement and final evidence report on screening for peripheral artery disease (PAD) and cardiovascular risk assessment with the ankle brachial index (ABI) in adults.

Cardiovascular disease, including heart disease and stroke, is the leading killer of both men and women in the United States. For some people, PAD, which causes reduced blood flow in the legs, can go hand-in-hand with cardiovascular disease. The ABI test, which compares blood pressure in the ankle with blood pressure in the arm, is used to detect if a person has PAD.

The Task Force found that for adults with no symptoms of PAD, the evidence was insufficient to determine if using the ABI test to screen for PAD and predict risk of cardiovascular disease is beneficial. Therefore, the Task Force issued an I statement, which means there is not enough evidence to make a definitive recommendation.

“Cardiovascular disease is the nation’s number one killer, and, as clinicians, we know that addressing the underlying risk factors can help to prevent heart attacks and strokes,” says Task Force member Kirsten Bibbins-Domingo, Ph.D., M.D. “Although the evidence is not yet clear on using the ABI test to evaluate cardiovascular disease risk in people with no symptoms, there are many other steps we know work to help to prevent cardiovascular disease—including eating a healthy diet and maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly, and not smoking.”

“Even though it is not clear if the ABI helps health care professionals make treatment decisions, there are many things clinicians can do to help their patients reduce their chance of heart attacks and strokes,” says USPSTF co-vice chair Albert Siu, M.D., M.S.P.H. “The USPSTF recommends screening for and managing high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, and diabetes and screening for tobacco use and providing cessation support.”

This statement does not apply to people who are having symptoms of PAD, such as leg pain when walking that is relieved with rest. People with symptoms should see a health professional and should receive appropriate diagnostic testing and therapy.

The Task Force’s final recommendation statement and final evidence report are published online in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, as well as on the Task Force Web site at: www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. A fact sheet that explains the recommendation statement in plain language is also available. Before finalizing this recommendation, the USPSTF posted a draft version for public comment in the spring of 2013.

The Task Force is an independent, volunteer panel of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine that works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based

recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications.

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