



## **Put your best foot forward!**

Without warning walking had become incredibly painful. This was a completely new experience for Derek who had enjoyed an active and varied career in the army, building and print industries.

Peripheral arterial disease affects nearly 20% of people over the age of 70. Intermittent claudication (pain occurring in the leg on walking) is the first form of peripheral arterial disease. When walking people can experience feelings of either pain, cramping, weakness, tightness, aching or giving out in the calves, thighs or buttocks which is only relieved on rest. When walking Derek experienced pain in his calves. Previously Derek walked most days for an hour or more, often in Burwood Forest collecting pine cones with his wife, as well as spending every spare moment in the garden or tending to his extensive array of cacti.

Derek's GP informed him that his blood pressure and cholesterol were high and also referred him to the Peripheral Vascular Service at Christchurch Hospital. One of the Nurse Specialists, Dawn, identified lifestyle changes that were needed and recommended a walking exercise program (Green Prescription) through Sport Canterbury to help Derek decrease his symptoms. Support and advice on how to tailor his walking in order to overcome the pain was the primary focus. Initially 100 meters was the maximum distance that Derek could walk until one leg required him to rest and wait for the pain to subside before walking on.

Walking is a crucial part of the treatment. Research has shown that by regular walking to the 'pain', but not through the 'pain', encourages the body to increase the volume of blood through the collateral circulation delivering this to the muscles that are doing the work. Therefore the improved blood flow in the legs reduces the pain. For several months ten minutes was the maximum duration of walking that Derek could manage. However, perseverance paid off and slowly the distances between stops began to be extended before the pain set in.

Derek took stock of other aspects of his lifestyle. He had never smoked but decided his diet could do with modifying. Butter was replaced with an unsaturated spread, and the cheese and biscuits were put on the occasional food list.

It was during a visit from his daughter and a trip to walk around the lake at Styx Reserve, that Derek first managed to walk for half an hour without pain. "It was a great relief when I suddenly could walk pain free. I've had great support from my family and Barbara at Green Prescription gave me encouragement to keep at it and an avenue to ask questions about other aspects of healthy lifestyles".

Derek's determination to control his health and pain has paid off, his cholesterol is again within an acceptable range and at 77 years he's once again back to all the activities he enjoys such as mowing the lawn and walking for an hour or more without pain.