



## Ankle-brachial index: A dirty word?

**S**ilence, roving eyes, fidgeting, excuses, a quick subject change—these are typical responses from healthcare clinicians when asked, “What’s the patient’s ankle-brachial index?” You’d think someone had just uttered a dirty word.



The ankle-brachial index (ABI) is a key component of the lower-extremity vascular exam, recommended and in some cases mandated by numerous clinical practice guidelines, including the most recent **international guidelines** on preventing and treating pressure ulcers.

Nonetheless, the ABI exam more often is omitted than performed. If a patient has an infection, we’d never omit taking

his or her temperature. Yet it’s commonplace to skip the ABI exam in patients with lower-extremity wounds. Why?

I’ve come up with three possible explanations:

- *Lack of knowledge:* Many clinicians have never heard of an ABI or don’t know how to measure it.
- *Poor access to equipment:* The vascular Doppler isn’t on the list of cheap supplies, and its purchase is often superseded by more frequently used supplies.
- *Lack of time:* The ABI exam can take 15 to 45 minutes, depending on the clinician’s skill and how quickly and easily the patient’s pulses can be found.

Although these are all valid explanations, they’re not justifiable reasons for failing to measure the patient’s ABI.

### Ideas and solutions

WCCs, DWCs, CWCNs, CWSs, and all other wound care experts should focus on sharing their knowledge with staff and healthcare community education efforts, such as hands-on ABI training sessions. Approach administrators at your healthcare organization with equipment requisitions for vascular Doppler devices, along with clinical practice guidelines that recommend the ABI exam. Explain to administrators that accurately differentiating vascular wounds from pressure

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wounds may decrease the organization's pressure ulcer prevalence rate.

Other suggestions:

- Contract with an outside agency to perform ABI exams for your facility or agency.
- Designate an official ABI staffer to assist with admissions.
- Consider using the **Lanarkshire Oximetry Index** as a substitute for ABIs.

For additional information, visit these other online links:

- Online **video** training
- ABI **policy and procedure**
- Measurement and interpretation of the ankle-brachial index: **A scientific**

**statement** from the American Heart Association

The ABI is an extremely beneficial tool that can aid early detection of peripheral arterial disease, in turn helping to prevent complications and amputations and potentially saving lives. ABI needs to come off the dirty-word list.



Donna Sardina, RN, MHA, WCC, CWCMS,  
DWC, OMS  
Editor-in-Chief  
*Wound Care Advisor*  
Cofounder, Wound Care Education Institute  
Plainfield, Illinois



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