OSCE checklist for peripheral vascular examination

An OSCE checklist for peripheral vascular examination covers consent, inspecting the legs and feet, checking temperature, capillary refill, sensation and pulses from groin to foot, listening for bruits, Buerger's test if asked, the ankle brachial pressure index and escalating acute limb ischaemia.

OSCE checklist for peripheral vascular examination: steps to practise

1. Clean your hands, introduce yourself, confirm the patient's name and date of birth (and wristband if an inpatient), explain the examination and gain consent.
2. Offer a chaperone, make sure of privacy, keep the room warm and expose both legs, keeping underwear on. Ask about pain before you touch.
3. Inspect the legs for colour, hair loss, shiny skin, ulcers, gangrene, scars, muscle wasting and swelling.
4. Look at the feet, between the toes and the heels for ulcers or breaks in the skin.
5. Feel the temperature of the legs from the thighs to the feet with the back of your hand, comparing both sides.
6. Check capillary refill time over the toes.
7. Feel the pulses: femoral, popliteal, posterior tibial and dorsalis pedis, comparing the two sides.
8. Palpate the abdomen gently for an expansile aortic swelling if your station asks.
9. Listen over the femoral arteries for bruits.
10. Check sensation in the feet, especially in a patient with diabetes.
11. Do Buerger's test if asked and if the patient can tolerate it: raise the legs and look for pallor, then sit the patient up with the legs hanging down and look for redness. Stop if it is painful.
12. Say you would check the ankle brachial pressure index and the blood pressure in both arms.
13. Escalate urgently to the vascular team if there are signs of acute limb ischaemia: pain, pallor, pulselessness, paraesthesia, paralysis and a cold limb.
14. Thank the patient, cover them, clean your hands, document and give a summary.

What candidates commonly forget

- Not comparing both sides
- Not feeling the femoral pulse
- Not looking between the toes and at the heels
- Not checking sensation in the feet
- Not mentioning the ankle brachial pressure index
- Not saying the signs of acute limb ischaemia and that they need urgent vascular review

Local policy comes first

This is our own practice checklist. Your college, hospital or country may do some steps differently. Where local policy and this list disagree, follow local policy.

Practise the hands-on steps with a classmate or in a skills lab, because an AI patient cannot watch your technique. You can practise the talking part with an AI patient, and try one station free with no sign-up. Next, try A cold painful leg of sudden onset. Back to the surgery OSCE for MBBS students page: surgery OSCE for MBBS students, or see the full OSCE checklist list.

Common questions

What is the OSCE checklist for peripheral vascular examination?

Introduce, consent, chaperone, inspect, feel temperature, capillary refill, palpate pulses from groin to foot, listen for bruits, check sensation, Buerger's test if asked, mention the ankle brachial pressure index, escalate acute ischaemia and summarise.

What are signs of acute limb ischaemia?

Pain, pallor, pulselessness, paraesthesia, paralysis and a cold limb. This is an emergency and needs urgent vascular review.

What is the ankle brachial pressure index?

A ratio of ankle to arm blood pressure used to assess blood flow to the legs. It is also checked before compression is used on a leg.

Sources

- NICE CG147: peripheral arterial disease
- NICE NG19: diabetic foot problems

Checked 2026-11-13. Fees and rules change, so confirm them with the regulator before you book.