

PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY

(Peripheral Neuritis)



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

A group of symptoms caused by damage to sensory nerves or motor nerves in the peripheral nervous system. This system is made up of nerves that branch out of the spinal cord and go to all parts of the body. Peripheral neuropathy usually affects the fingers, toes, hands, feet, lower arms, and legs. It may affect bladder or bowel control.

- Sensory nerve damage affects sensations (such as heat, cold, and pain). The sensations may be abnormal, decreased, or lacking.
- Motor nerve damage affects muscle movement or function. It results in muscle weakness, decreased movement, or loss of control of movement.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Burning, tingling, and numbness in a localized area, frequently in the hands and feet.
- Shooting pain that is often worse at night. Pain is made worse by touch or temperature changes.
- Muscle weakness throughout the body on one or both sides. It is often in the same place on both sides.
- Painless ulcers on the toes or fingers.
- Pale, dry skin that becomes sensitive to touch.
- Severe back pain or loss of bladder or bowel control, if caused by back disk disease.

CAUSES

Damage may be from nerve destruction, pressure, or degeneration. The damage may be to one nerve or nerve group. Nerves become damaged due to a number of causes. Sometimes, no cause is found.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Adults over 60.
- Exposure to certain chemicals or toxic substances.
- Certain drugs.
- Poor nutrition (not eating a healthy diet).
- Poor control of diabetes.
- Alcoholism.
- Family history of neuropathies.
- Nerve disorders, nerve injury, or pressure on nerves.
- Autoimmune disorder, or connective tissue disease.
- Infections, kidney or liver failure, and some cancers.
- Bone fractures or ruptured disk.
- Some hereditary disorders.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

No specific preventive measures.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Mild cases may be cured if nerve damage is limited and the underlying cause is diagnosed and treated. More severe cases may be incurable, but treatment can often help symptoms improve.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Complications can cause chronic pain, disability, and may sometimes be life-threatening.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask questions about your symptoms and activities. Medical tests may be done to discover any underlying medical disorder.
- The most important aspect of treatment is to identify any underlying cause and, if possible, treat it.
- Other treatments may include drugs, physical and occupational therapy, diet and exercise, assistive devices, relaxation techniques (such as biofeedback training), surgery to relieve pressure, and others.
- Your health care provider will discuss your diagnosis and a specific treatment plan with you. No one plan works for everyone.
- For self-care: Inspect hands and feet daily for unnoticed wounds. Keep feet clean and toenails trimmed properly. Wear shoes that fit well. Take measures to make your home a safe place for you.
- Surgery is helpful in some cases.

MEDICATIONS

- For minor pain, use nonprescription ibuprofen or acetaminophen. Other pain drugs may be prescribed.
- A variety of drugs can be used to treat the symptoms. Your health care provider will discuss the options and the risks and benefits.
- Drugs to treat underlying disorder may be prescribed.

ACTIVITY

Physical therapy and exercises to do at home may be recommended. If you have difficulty maintaining balance, walk with a cane or other support.

DIET

If poor nutrition is a cause, eat a healthy diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of peripheral neuropathy.
- Symptoms persist or worsen despite treatment.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page