

Patient information

Diabetic Peripheral Neuropathy (nerve pain)

Podiatry

Nerve pain, also known as neuropathic pain, is a result of one of the complications of diabetes, called peripheral neuropathy, or diabetic neuropathy.

This type of nerve pain can affect people with both type 1 and type 2 diabetes.

Why does diabetic nerve pain occur?

Diabetic nerve pain most commonly occurs when a person with diabetes has prolonged spells of high blood sugar levels (hyperglycaemia).

It is thought that high blood glucose affects the nerves by damaging the blood vessels which supply them.

High blood pressure, in addition to hyperglycaemia, also has a detrimental effect on the nerves.

Smoking and alcohol are also known to increase the risk of nerve pain occurring.

Where does diabetic nerve pain typically occur?

Diabetic nerve pain usually occurs in peripheral regions or extremities, such as feet and legs, hands and arms.

Neuropathic foot pain is one of several conditions affecting the feet which are termed as problems of 'the diabetic foot'.

For this reason, people with diabetes are advised to undergo a foot examination once each year.

A foot exam can help in two ways; by helping to diagnose new problems, such as diabetic neuropathy or circulation problems and it can also help to spot further complications of the foot such as wounds, blisters and a joint disorder known as Charcot arthropathy or Charcot foot.

What are the symptoms of diabetic nerve pain?

Diabetic nerve pain symptoms can include:

- Prickling or tingling feelings

- A burning sensation
- Sharp, stabbing or shooting pains in the aforementioned areas.

These can range from mild to extreme.
In serious cases the whole area may become numb.

How does neuropathic pain affect people with diabetes?

Unfortunately, diabetic nerve pain can be very dangerous for people with diabetes.

At an early stage it can impact on day-to-day activities such as walking, exercising or working with the hands.

At a later stage diabetic nerve pain can make even standing difficult.

One of the dangers of diabetic neuropathy is that it can lead to a foot ulcer (wound) developing. In addition, if you have high blood sugars and poor circulation, it can mean the wound may take longer to heal and be more susceptible to infection, which can sometimes result in amputation.

I have diabetes and I'm worried about neuropathy pain, what should I do?

If you have diabetes and are concerned about diabetes nerve pain, contact your doctor or health care professional immediately to discuss your symptoms or take their advice. Doctors can diagnose diabetic nerve pain and help educate those with diabetes to manage blood sugar levels more effectively.

Can diabetic nerve pain be treated?

People suffering from nerve pain will usually be encouraged to make changes to their lifestyle and or their diabetes, such as giving up or cutting down on alcohol or smoking, taking more exercise and may receive help with controlling their blood sugar levels.

Your doctor may also offer treatments to reduce the symptoms of pain.

Medications for diabetic nerve pain

Medications which may be offered could include:

- Amitriptyline
- Pregabalin
- Duloxetine
- Nortriptyline
- Imipramine
- Lidocaine
- Tramadol.

You must notify the DVLA if you have peripheral neuropathy. Failing to do so may result in a fine of up to £1000.

What should I do if I have a concern or problem with my feet?

If you notice any of these signs you must contact a member of your Multi-disciplinary Foot Care Team, local Podiatry Department or GP for advice as soon as possible (within 24 hours).

- A red, hot, swollen toe or foot
- A new break or wound in the skin
- New redness or discolouration of your toe or foot
- New or unexplained pain in your foot

If you discover any new breaks in the skin or blisters, cover them with a sterile dressing. Do not burst blisters.

If your Multi-disciplinary Foot Care Team, local Podiatry Department or GP are not available, and there is no sign of your foot healing within 24 hours, go to your local accident and emergency department.

Feedback

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Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Further information

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