

Neuropathy ►

Diabetic neuropathies are a family of nerve disorders caused by diabetes. People with diabetes can, over time, develop nerve damage throughout the body. Some people with nerve damage have no symptoms. Others may have symptoms such as pain, tingling or numbness—loss of feeling—in their hands, arms, feet and legs. Nerve problems can occur in every organ system, including the digestive tract, heart, and sex organs.

About 60 to 70 percent of people with diabetes have some form of neuropathy. People with diabetes can develop nerve problems at any time, but risk arises with age and longer duration of diabetes. The highest rates of neuropathy are among people who have had diabetes for at least 25 years. Diabetic neuropathies also appear to be more common in people who have problems controlling their blood glucose, also called blood sugar, as well as those with high levels of blood fat and blood pressure and those who are overweight.



WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF DIABETIC NEUROPATHIES?

Symptoms depend on the type of neuropathy and which nerves are affected. Some people with nerve damage have no symptoms at all. For others, the first symptom is often numbness, tingling or pain in the feet. Symptoms are often minor at first, and because most nerve damage occurs over several years, mild cases may go unnoticed for a long time. Symptoms can involve the sensory motor and autonomic—or involuntary—nervous systems. In some people, mainly those with focal neuropathy, the onset of pain may be sudden and severe.

Symptoms of nerve damage may include:

- numbness, tingling or pain in the toes, feet, legs, hands, arms and fingers
- wasting of the muscles of the feet or hands
- indigestion, nausea or vomiting
- diarrhea or constipation
- dizziness or faintness due to a drop in blood pressure after standing or sitting up
- problems with urination
- erectile dysfunction in men and vaginal dryness in women
- weakness

Symptoms that are not due to neuropathy, but often accompany it, include weight loss and depression.

HOW CAN I PREVENT DIABETIC NEUROPATHY?

The best way to prevent neuropathy is to keep your blood glucose levels as close to the normal range as possible. Maintaining safe blood glucose levels protects nerves throughout your body.

HOW ARE DIABETIC NEUROPATHIES DIAGNOSED?

Doctors diagnose neuropathy on the basis of symptoms and a physical exam. During the exam, your doctor may check blood pressure, heart rate, muscle strength, reflexes and sensitivity to position changes, vibration, temperature or light touch.



FOOT EXAMS

Experts recommend that people with diabetes have a comprehensive foot exam each year to check for peripheral neuropathy. People diagnosed with peripheral neuropathy need more frequent foot exams. A comprehensive foot exam assesses the skin, muscles, bones, circulation and sensation of the feet. Your doctor may assess protective sensation or feeling in your feet by touching your foot with a nylon monofilament—similar to a bristle on a hairbrush—attached to a wand or by pricking your foot with a pin. People who cannot sense pressure from a pinprick or monofilament have lost protective sensation and are at risk for developing foot sores that may not heal properly. The doctor may also check temperature perception or use a tuning fork, which is more sensitive than touch pressure, to assess vibration perception.

FOOT CARE

People with neuropathy need to take special care of their feet. The nerves to the feet are the longest in the body and are the ones most often affected by neuropathy. Loss of sensation in the feet means that sores or injuries may not be noticed and may become ulcerated or infected. Circulation problems also increase the risk of foot ulcers.

More than half of all lower-limb amputations in the United States occur in people with diabetes—86,000 amputations per year. Doctors estimate that nearly half of the amputations caused by neuropathy and poor circulation could have been prevented by careful foot care.

Source: "Diabetic Neuropathies: The Nerve Damage of Diabetes." National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. Web. <<http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/dm/pubs/neuropathies/>>.



Take Action Challenge!

MAKE AN APPOINTMENT TO GET YOUR FEET CHECKED.

Call your doctor's office or health center today. Schedule a time to get a foot exam.

Foot Exam! Date: _____ Time: _____

Special Instructions: _____

National Toll Free Number: 1-800-347-8023

National Fax Line: 1-800-207-5817

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