

# Peripheral Neuropathy



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

Peripheral neuropathy happens where there is an injury or damage to the nerves that are further away from the brain and spinal cord. They are called peripheral nerves and often affect the arms, hands, and fingers, or legs, feet and toes.

## About neuropathy

Neuropathy can affect one or more nerves in the body. It may be caused by problems from diabetes, trauma, infection, poor wound healing, constant pressure on nerves, auto immune disease, exposure to toxins, poor nutrition, or other genetic reasons. Sometimes, a cause may not be known.

There are three types of peripheral neuropathy that can affect the body:

- **Sensory nerves** that help you to feel pain, touch, temperature, position and vibration.
- **Motor nerves** that help you to move and maintain muscle tone and balance.
- **Autonomic nerves** that can affect internal organs, such as breathing.

## Signs of neuropathy

- Pain, may be constant or come and go. May be a stabbing pain at times.
- Numbness, loss of feeling or tingling
- Cold, pinching or burning feeling
- Trouble using your fingers for everyday tasks, such as buttoning shirt or tying shoes
- Changes in movement, such as trouble picking up feet when walking
- Stomach pain or cramps
- Problems urinating or passing stool

## Testing

You will have a physical exam. A personal health history and family health history will be given. Your doctor may order one or more of these tests:

- **Sensation test:** This is a quick test that involves the use of a thin plastic wire called a monofilament. The wire is touched at different places on the body to determine feeling and pressure.
- **Electromyogram and nerve conduction tests:** These tests are used to check how nerves respond to electrical stimulation.

- Lumbar puncture: This test draws a sample of fluid from the space that surrounds the spinal cord and nerve roots.
- Blood tests
- Nerve biopsy: Surgery may be scheduled to check a sample of nerve tissue that is then sent to a laboratory for analysis.

## Treatment

Treatment is used to reduce pain or other signs of neuropathy. Treatment does not heal damaged nerves or bring back a loss of feeling. Treatment may include:

- Medicines
- Physical or occupational therapy
- Surgery
- Lifestyle behaviors: Exercise at least 30 minutes a day most days of the week, eat healthy foods, and work to keep blood sugar levels in a recommended range. Talk with your doctor or dietitian for help.
- **Depending on the severity of your neuropathy, it may be unsafe for you to drive a vehicle. Talk to your doctor about driving.**

## Safety

If you have peripheral neuropathy, any loss of feeling can leave the body at risk for injury. You may not be aware of mild irritations on the hands and feet that can quickly lead to skin damage or wounds. To protect yourself:

- Check the skin on your arms, hand, fingers and legs, feet and toes every day. Check for cuts and sores to reduce your chance of skin infection.
- Always wear socks with closed-toe shoes to reduce the risk of infection.
- Do not exposure your body to very cold or very hot temperatures to avoid frostbite or skin burns.
- Special equipment may be found at medical supply stores to make dressing easier, such as zipper pulls, buttoners, molded sock aids, or Velcro straps.
- Consider ways to make your environment at home and work safer, such as turning on lights before you enter a room, keeping rooms and stairs free of hazards and clutter, using handrails, using non-skid strips or mats in tubs and showers, and using rubber gloves to clean dishes.

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**Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.**

For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at **614-293-3707** or e-mail **health-info@osu.edu**.