

Diabetic Neuropathy – types, causes, symptoms, complications and reversal



Diabetic Neuropathy is a very dire condition that is quite common among diabetic patients having either Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes. The complication results in damage to the patient's nervous system.

The condition manifests itself when high levels of sugar, triglycerides, and fats in the body damage the nervous system, resulting in neuropathy - a medical term used for damage, dysfunction or disease of the nerves.

When blood glucose levels are not reversed or treated, and remain high, over extended periods of time, the blood vessels which feed the nerves can also become damaged. These blood vessels nourish our nerves with oxygen and nutrients without which our nerves cannot function well.

This in turn leads to nerve damage and then to damage and dysfunction of organs and other parts of the body.

Who is prone to diabetic neuropathy?

As many as one-third to half of all diabetics will suffer from this condition, if untreated. The older a diabetic is, the higher the chances of having diabetic neuropathy. Scientific studies reveal that people who are diabetic and also overweight or have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, advanced kidney disease, consume too much alcohol, and smokers are more likely to develop diabetic neuropathy.

A brief overview of the nervous system

The nervous system in a healthy person is a complex network of fine, tubular structures that
a) is made up of the central nervous system encompassing the brain and spine and the peripheral nervous system that comprises all the nerves other than those around the brain and spinal cord
b) covers the length and breadth of the human body, leaving no part excluded
c) conducts signals/ information from the different parts of the body to the brain in the form of electric impulses and transmits the instructions back to guide our physical impulses.

These messages/ instructions include:

- Transmitting information about what is happening in different parts of the body
- Control voluntary movements and coordination of body parts
- Control of body functions such as digestion, breathing, blinking, and body balance
- Maintaining homeostasis by regulating blood pressure, circadian rhythms, thermoregulation, endocrine glands, and more
- Sense reception and processing such as vision, speech, pain, hearing, intelligence, memory and emotions
- Prompting reflex actions or involuntary responses to peripheral nervous stimulation

Types of Diabetic Neuropathy

Peripheral neuropathy is nerve damage that typically affects the feet and legs and sometimes the hands and arms.

Autonomic neuropathy is a condition in which there is damage to the nerves that control the internal organs. The condition can lead to issues with the heart rate and blood pressure, digestive system, bladder, reproductive organs, sweat glands, vision, and ability to sense low blood sugar levels.

Focal neuropathy is a condition in which you have damage to a single group of nerves. Most often, it occurs in the hand, head, torso, and leg. The most common Focal neuropathy affects the carpal tunnel, creating nerve compression at the wrist.

Proximal neuropathy is not very common. It is a debilitating type of nerve damage found in the hip, buttock, or thigh region, and typically affects one side of your body. It rarely spreads to the other side. Proximal neuropathy causes acute pain and often leads to major weight loss.

Symptoms that are indicative of diabetic neuropathy

The symptoms of diabetic neuropathy will manifest itself differently, depending on the type of diabetic neuropathy that a patient has. Peripheral neuropathy can cause loss of sensation

in the feet, while the other types show up with symptoms like a burning sensation or shooting pain in the lower limbs. It is important to note that nerve damage takes years to develop, so in certain cases, the patient may not be aware of the symptoms of mild nerve damage for a long while. However, in certain cases, severe pain begins suddenly.

Complications that arise from diabetic neuropathy

Complications from this disease differ, depending on the type of neuropathy. Peripheral neuropathy creates problems related to the foot - such as sores, ulcers, and infections. This is because nerve damage can create loss of feeling in the feet and the patient may not notice sores caused by shoe bites or toe and foot injuries.

Neuropathy can also cause imbalance and lack of proper motor coordination, leading to falls, injuries and fractures that take long to heal. The loss of independence resulting from these issues can lead to depression and anxiety.

Autonomic neuropathy can create anomalies in your heart rate, blood pressure, digestion, urination, and ability to sense hypoglycemia.

A few steps that can prevent diabetic neuropathy

One of the most important ways to prevent diabetic neuropathy is by efficient management of blood glucose, blood pressure, cholesterol levels and weight. This can be achieved with adequate exercise, a diabetes-friendly diet and medication as prescribed by your physician. Attending a diabetes reversal program is also a good way to stall the onset of diabetic neuropathy. In addition to this, doctors recommend limited alcohol consumption and a complete ban on smoking.

Foot care is an important part of preventing diabetic neuropathy and more so in the case of peripheral neuropathy. Diabetics must take special care of their feet – check every day, for ingrown toenails, scratches, cuts, wounds and cracks in the heel.

Considering how common the disease is, patients can be assured of help from experts who have treated and helped thousands of similar cases. There are several excellent Diabetes Reversal Programs which promote a diabetes-friendly lifestyle, help in reversing diabetes and preventing diabetes-related complications.

Check out the "Diabetes Reversal" journey by participating in the Discover Reversal Session by Freedom From Diabetes. The introductory session of our Holistic Transformation Program, conducted by Dr. Pramod Tripathi, a renowned expert on diabetes reversal will address several questions that you may have, regarding yourself or a loved one who may be diabetic.