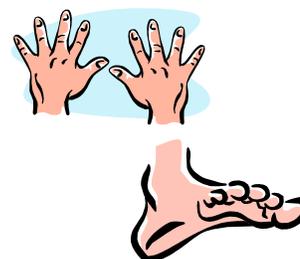


## **Complications of Diabetes: Nerve Damage (Neuropathy)**

### **What is diabetic neuropathy?**

Diabetic neuropathy is nerve damage caused by diabetes. The most common form of diabetic neuropathy is loss of sensation in the hands and feet. It is called peripheral neuropathy.



Diabetic neuropathy can also affect the nerves that regulate unconscious vital functions, such as heart rate and digestion. This type of problem is called autonomic neuropathy.

### **How does it occur?**

Doctors have been studying this problem for many years, but they do not yet understand how diabetes damages the nervous system. However, they have observed that good control of blood sugar levels helps prevent diabetic neuropathy.

### **What are the symptoms?**

The symptoms of **peripheral neuropathy** include:

- ◆ numbness and loss of feeling (usually first in the feet or hands)
- ◆ slower reflexes
- ◆ pain ranging from minor discomfort or tingling in fingers and toes to severe pain
- ◆ pain that may be sharp or lightning like, deep aches that make sleep or daily activities difficult, or extreme sensitivity to the slightest touch
- ◆ weak muscles.

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The symptoms of **autonomic neuropathy** include:

- ◆ low blood pressure and dizziness when you rise quickly from sitting or lying down
- ◆ rapid or irregular heartbeats
- ◆ trouble having an erection
- ◆ nausea or vomiting
- ◆ difficulty swallowing
- ◆ constipation or diarrhea.

### **How is it treated?**

There is no treatment for neuropathy. The best approach is to control the diabetes.



Muscle weakness is treated with support, such as splints. Pain-killing drugs or cream applied to the skin may help pain during the night. Medications can be used to treat nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

If you have neuropathy, it is especially important to try to prevent injuries such as burns, cuts, or broken bones.

### **How long will the effects last?**

The neuropathy will continue once you have it. However, you may be able to stop it from worsening by keeping your blood sugar under good control.

### **How can I take care of myself?**

Neuropathy worsens other diabetes-related complications. For example, if you have lost feeling in your feet and legs, you may not know you have an injury or infection until it develops into a bad sore. Make sure you:

- ◆ Look for injuries on the skin of your feet and lower legs regularly.
- ◆ See your provider promptly about sores on the skin or other possible problems so they can be treated properly.
- ◆ See your health care provider or a podiatrist about corns or calluses on your feet.

- ◆ Wear good-fitting, comfortable shoes that protect your feet.

Men who have trouble having erections should talk to their health care providers. There are medications and devices that can be put in the penis to help a man achieve and maintain an erection.

## How can I help prevent diabetic neuropathy?

The best way to help prevent diabetic neuropathy is to:

Control your diabetes. Try to keep your blood sugar at a normal level.



Maintain normal blood pressure.

Exercise regularly, according to your health care provider's recommendation.



Stop smoking.

Limit the amount of alcohol you drink because it can cause neuropathy too.

Eat a healthy diet with fruits and vegetables (some vitamin deficiencies can cause neuropathy).



Keep your checkup appointments with your health care provider.

Developed by Clinical Reference Systems.

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