

FAST FACTS: Neuropathic Pain

Neuropathic pain is a result of damage in the nervous system. This can be a disturbance in the function of one or more nerves and is often associated with damage to major organs. The pain is often described as burning, numbness, tingling, electric shock-like, and possibly deep aching.

Diabetic Neuropathy

- Injury to nerve fibers from high blood sugar, most often in hands and feet
- Signs/Symptoms: numbness and tingling
- Treatment/Management: control blood sugar, proper foot care and shoes, prescription medications.

Post-herpetic Neuralgia

- Complication of shingles and is a burning pain that lasts long after the rash and blisters disappear
- Signs/Symptoms: burning at shingles site, sensitivity to touch, muscle weakness
- Treatment: prescription medications.

Multiple Sclerosis

- Autoimmune disease of unknown cause; destroys the protective sheath on nerves.
- Signs/Symptoms: painful muscle spasms, numbness, weakness of limb on one side, unsteady walking, blurriness, loss of vision, tingling/electric-shock sensations.
- Treatment: prescription and over the counter medications, massage, use muscle relaxants for muscle spasms with caution.

Spinal Cord Injuries / Muscular Weakness Affecting Only One Side of Body

- Causes: trauma, arthritis, cancer, inflammation/infection, degeneration, strokes.
- Signs/Symptoms: loss of sensation/movement or bowel/bladder control, pain, exaggerated reflex.
- Treatment: prescription medications; TENS unit and massage.

Peripheral Neuropathy

- Definition: damage to nerves outside brain or central nervous system.
- Causes: trauma and infections; toxins such as alcohol or poisons; diseases such as lupus, Guillain-Barre, Lyme; vitamin B deficiency; hypothyroid or kidney disease.
- Signs/Symptoms: numbness & tingling in hands, feet, and many other sites.
- Treatment: prescription medications, TENS unit and massage.



Assessment

- Older adults with neuropathic pain may suffer due to inadequate pain control.
- Assess using the [ID Pain: A Neuropathic Pain Screen](#).
- Accurate and timely assessment and communication from the nurse is essential to help the provider determine the appropriate action.
- As identified in the causes of neuropathic pain above, the signs and symptoms to assess are specific to the cause.

Interventions and Treatment

[Geriatric Pain Management Guide Neuropathic Pain](#)

- The specific cause(s) of pain are linked to various treatments.
- Repositioning, avoiding pressure, gentle massage, or cold therapy (instead of heat) or a TENS unit may relieve pain temporarily.
- Traditional pain medications are not always effective; however, a trial of traditional pain medication should be considered.
- Adjunctive pain medications (antidepressants, anticonvulsants, which impact the nerves may be indicated.
- Be sure to report current pain medications and their effectiveness.
- Instruct on how to use a [Pain Diary](#) to note important information useful to the healthcare provider.

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References

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