

Diabetic Neuropathy - factsheet

What is diabetic neuropathy?

Diabetic neuropathy damage to your nerves which can affect various parts of the body, including the digestive system and heart muscles as well as cause significant pain and discomfort throughout the body, although most significantly the feet, legs and hands. It is a common complication with more than half of all people with diabetes experiencing some form of neuropathy within their lifetime.



How does having diabetes cause neuropathy?

High levels of glucose in the blood over a prolonged period can affect your nerve sensations in the same way that it can affect the blood vessels in your eyes (retinopathy.) This in turn makes it more of a risk to people with diabulimia or T1ED who may be running high blood sugars through insulin omission or other eating behaviours that influence their glucose levels.

What are the common signs and symptoms of diabetic neuropathy?

Signs of neuropathy are known to include the following:

- Burning pain
- Tingling sensations, often like pins or needles
- The feeling of running water down your legs
- Cramps in hands and feet
- Numbness



What are the different types of neuropathy?

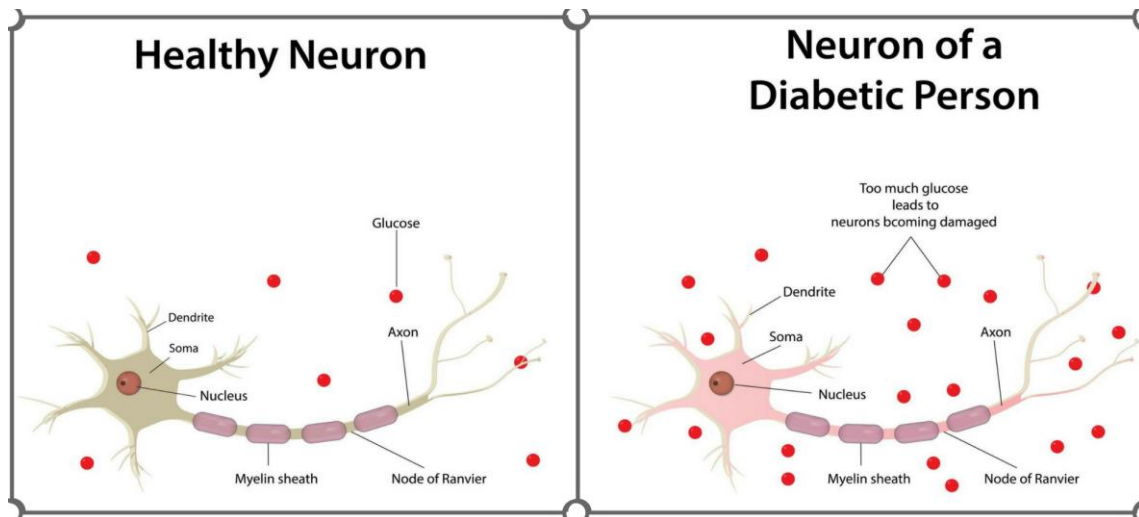
Neuropathy can present itself in various forms and affect different parts of the body.

- **Peripheral neuropathy:** Peripheral neuropathy is the most common type. It results in numbness or pain in the feet, legs, hands, and arms. Peripheral neuropathy can be particularly problematic, since it leads to diminished sensation in the feet. Without normal sensation, minor foot injuries may go unnoticed until they become severe. If uncontrolled infection spreads to the bone, toes or the entire foot may eventually need to be amputated.
- **Autonomic neuropathy:** This type of diabetic neuropathy affects nerves that control your heart rate, blood pressure, digestive system, and sexual function. As a result, people with diabetes may experience fluctuations in heart rate and blood pressure, digestion problems, and sexual dysfunction.
- **Proximal neuropathy:** Proximal neuropathy leads to impaired nerve function in your hips, thighs, or buttocks. This can cause pain as well as leg weakness. People with this type of neuropathy may require help getting in and out of chairs because their thigh strength is decreased. Proximal neuropathy usually occurs on one side of the body.
- **Focal neuropathy:** With this neuropathy, pain or muscle weakness may occur suddenly in any part of your body. Nerves in the head, torso, and extremities tend to be affected most often. Focal neuropathy can cause double vision, facial weakness (known as Bell's palsy), and intense muscle pain. Though painful and often erratic, focal neuropathy usually gets better on its own without any long-term effects. (Krisha McCoy, 2009)¹

Treatment options for neuropathy

Other than medically approved exercise and topical creams, there are certain medications that may be used to treat neuropathic pain. These must always be prescribed by a doctor and options are anti-depressants such as **Duloxetine** or **Amytriptaline**, or anti-seizure treatments such as the most commonly used **Pregabalin** or **Gapabantin**. However these drugs can often lead to adverse side effects and finding the right fit for you with help from your GP or diabetic team may take some adjusting.

¹ Krisha McCoy, M. R. (2009, May 5). *How to Contol Diabetic Neiropathy*. Retrieved from Everyday Health: <https://www.everydayhealth.com/type-1-diabetes/diabetic-neuropathy.aspx>



People with eating disorders and type 1 diabetes are at a high risk of diabetic neuropathy as a result of insulin omission and persistently high blood sugar levels. The progression of diabetic neuropathy can be prevented by the reduction in glucose levels and HBA1C at a gradual rate and with input from your medical team.

