

Patient Information Leaflet – Neuropathic Pain

What is neuropathic pain?

Neuropathic pain or ‘nerve pain’ is pain that occurs because of damage or changes to nerves.

Damage to nerves can occur for many different reasons and your doctor may wish to discuss this with you in more detail.

Neuropathic pain can also develop as a result of changes to nerves that develop over time. Nerves are continually changing based on our experiences and learning and sometimes these changes can result in the development of pain or abnormal sensations. This process is called ‘neuroplasticity’.

The nerves effected could potentially be anywhere in the body. However, nerve pain in the legs and feet is more common. [1]

What are the symptoms of neuropathic pain?

Common symptoms of neuropathic pain include:

- Pins and needles;
- A burning or sharp pain usually in the feet and legs;
- Feeling pain from something that should not be painful at all, i.e. very light touching. [1]

How long will I have neuropathic pain for?

This can vary considerably and depends upon the cause of the nerve damage. Some cases of neuropathic pain may

References

[1] NHS, “Peripheral Neuropathy - Symptoms,” NHS, 02 July 2014. [Online]. Available: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Peripheral-neuropathy/Pages/Symptoms.aspx>. [Accessed 11 April 2016].

improve with time if the underlying cause is treated. However, in some cases, neuropathic pain is permanent and can even become progressively worse over time. [1]

Your doctor will be able to provide you with further advice.

What treatments are available for neuropathic pain?

Abnormal sensations due to nerve damage may not require medication. Nerve pain may respond to typical pain killers, for example paracetamol or ibuprofen. However, medicines that act on the nerves themselves may be needed. There are many different types of nerve medicines available and your doctor will discuss treatment options, including the risks and benefits of each, with you before you start to take your medicine.

What are the alternatives to taking oral medicines?

As discussed, there are medicines that can be taken to treat neuropathic pain but there are also alternative treatments to oral medicines that can be useful:

Topical medicines can be used if your neuropathic pain is localised to a particular area of the body.

Other pain management techniques can help to reduce the distress associated with abnormal neuropathic sensations. This may include alternative therapies to medicines such as: psychological therapies, postural training and increased fitness and exercise. These treatments can often be a better method of management of the pain than taking medication.

Your doctor will be able to advise you if any alternative treatments might be suitable for the management of your pain.

What happens if I am still in pain?

If your doctor has started a medicine for your nerve pain and **after 6 – 8 weeks** you are still in pain your doctor will discuss alternative treatments with you. These may include prescribing you another medicine and carefully stopping the first medicine, or discussing alternative pain management strategies.

What about side effects?

Unfortunately, all medicines have the potential to cause side effects. Sometimes the medicines that are used to treat nerve pain can have side effects associated with them.

Your doctor will be aiming to treat your pain with the medicine that causes the least number of side effects. It is important that if you experience any side effects and you are thinking about stopping your medication to discuss this with your doctor or pharmacist first.

Some medicines cannot be stopped suddenly and your doctor or pharmacist can advise you regarding stopping medication safely.

Once discontinued, your doctor has the option of prescribing another medicine to control your pain

If you are given any further written information, please read it carefully.

You may notice that a manufacturer's information leaflet supplied with the medicine is not specific to you. For example, you may notice that it does not include information about the condition for which you are being treated, or it may state a dose that is different from that which the doctor has prescribed.

A common example of this is the use of certain antidepressant and epilepsy medicines to treat pain. These have a licence for the treatment of depression or epilepsy but not pain and so the information leaflet enclosed with the medicine does not refer to pain.

If you are unsure what you are taking your medicine for, please discuss this with your pharmacist or doctor.

You are also encouraged to report any side effects using the Yellow Card Scheme – go to www.mhra.gov.uk to find out more.

What do I do if I want more information?

Please talk to your doctor or pharmacist. They are knowledgeable and experienced with medicines and will be pleased to answer your questions.

For More Information Contact:

Name:

Telephone:

Job Role:

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Midlands and Lancashire CSU

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References

[1] NHS, "Peripheral Neuropathy - Symptoms," NHS, 02 July 2014. [Online]. Available: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Peripheral-neuropathy/Pages/Symptoms.aspx>. [Accessed 11 April 2016].