

Neuropathic (Nerve) Pain

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Pain caused by changes in your nervous system is known as neuropathic pain, or nerve pain. Nerve pain is different than pain caused by surgery, illness or injury. It can be described as burning, shooting, numbness, tingling or feelings like pins and needles.

The cause of nerve pain is not always known and can result from many causes. Some of the most common include:

- a disease that damages nerves in the feet and hands (peripheral neuropathy caused by diabetes or HIV)
- sensations and/or pain from a foot, leg, hand or arm that was amputated (known as phantom limb pain)
- pain that remains after recovering from a herpes infection (known as postherpetic neuralgia)
- certain medicines (chemotherapy or HIV medicines)
- pain that develops after an injury to an arm or leg (known as complex regional pain syndrome)
- pain that develops after a stroke (known as post-stroke syndrome).

Nerve Pain Treatment

Treatment often includes medicine, exercise or other therapies, such as acupuncture or biofeedback.

Many medicines are able to “calm down” the nervous system but some work better than others. For instance, nerve pain may not respond well to anti-inflammatory medicine such as ibuprofen and aspirin.

You may also have another type of nerve pain best treated by a combination of medicines.

It may take awhile for your health care provider to find the right medicine for you. Follow their directions for medicine, exercise, diet and other therapies.

Medicines Used to Treat Nerve Pain

Medicines prescribed for other symptoms also may reduce nerve pain:

- Anticonvulsants are used to treat seizures. Common brands prescribed to treat nerve pain are:
 - gabapentin (Neurontin[®])
 - pregabalin (Lyrica[®])
 - carbamazepine (Tegretol[®])
 - topiramate (Topamax[®])
 - lamotrigine (Lamictal[®])
 - levetiracetam (Keppra[®]).

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- Antidepressants are used to treat depression.

Common brands prescribed to treat nerve pain are:

- duloxetine (Cymbalta®)
- venlafaxine (Effexor®)
- amitriptyline (Elavil®)
- nortriptyline (Pamelor®)
- imipramine (Tofranil®)
- doxepin (Adapin®, Sinequan®)
- bupropion (Wellbutrin XL®).

- Other medicines:

- Lidoderm® patches
- methadone
- ketamine.

Talk with your health care provider if your medicine does not work. Your provider can safely stop and start a different medicine.

Medicine Side Effects

The most common side effects of the medicines prescribed for nerve pain may cause you to feel drowsy, lightheaded or dizzy. Side effects usually improve once your body becomes used to the medicine.

Please read the information that came with your prescription.

Your health care provider will start your medicine at a low dose. The dose will be increased slowly to help prevent side effects.

Important: Do not change your dose or stop taking your medicine without your health care provider's approval. Most of the medicines need to be slowly decreased over time.

If you cannot tolerate the side effects or if your symptoms change, talk with your health care provider.