

DIABETES ONE ON ONE

July 1, 2001

Peripheral Neuropathy

Peripheral neuropathy can be due to many causes, but diabetes is very frequently the origin. Twenty per cent of those who first learn that they have diabetes have some evidence of neuropathy at the time of diagnosis. Almost all cases can be re-versed if caught early. People with neuropathy, usually feel a ranging pain in their feet. It is possible to have neuropathy without pain, which is actually more problematic. You don't know what you can't feel.

Peripheral neuropathy testing is done on sensory nerves only. A small electrode is attached to the great toe. Then a low level electrical pulse is administered and increased slowly until the patient senses it. The impulse feels like a tingling, a itching, or a warm sensation. The first tingle means the end of that phase of the testing. Some patients may have experienced the painful nerve conduction studies where the speed of electricity is measure as it passes the length of a nerve. This is not that kind of examination.



Be sure your doctor checks your feet at every visit.

Peripheral neuropathy can result in serious health difficulties. If your sensory nerves are damaged, you may be un-able to feel painful experiences. For example, you could step on a rusty nail and not know it. If you could sense the nail, you would lift your foot before you were cut. Infection can arise and not be felt in early stages. Falls become a problem when someone cannot feel where their feet are. Neuropathy, in association with poor circulation, is the most common underlying reason for amputation. This test may discover the first symptom of another neurological disorder.

Treatment is quite helpful in the early phase of neuropathy but often cannot be reversed in late stages. Still, control of the progression of complications is possible.