

Preventing Diabetic Neuropathy

Diabetic neuropathy is nerve damage that diabetes causes. About half of all people who have diabetes have nerve damage to some degree. Usually people who've had diabetes for a long time develop symptoms. Learn more about diabetic neuropathy, its effects and what you can do to prevent it.



Types of diabetic neuropathy

There are several types of diabetic neuropathy. This is because there are many different types of nerves in the body. The four main types of diabetic neuropathy are:

- **Proximal neuropathy** — which typically affects elderly people with diabetes. It presents with muscle weakness in the upper legs, buttocks and hips.
- **Peripheral neuropathy** — which is the most common type of diabetic neuropathy. It presents with tingling, pain, numbness and weakness in the hands and feet.
- **Focal neuropathy** — which affects a single nerve. Symptoms come on suddenly and typically affect the head. It can also cause numbness or shooting pain in the legs.
- **Autonomic neuropathy** — which affects the nerves that control body systems. It affects people differently, ranging from problems with digestion to problems with sight.

What causes diabetic neuropathy?

The specific causes of diabetic neuropathy can be different. It depends on the type of neuropathy you have. In general, uncontrolled blood sugar harms the nerves and makes it hard for them to work like they're supposed to. High blood sugar can also damage your blood vessels and keep important nutrients and oxygen from reaching the nerves. Other causes are inflammation, family history and alcohol or tobacco use.

Problems due to diabetic neuropathy

In addition to the uncomfortable symptoms of pain, tingling and numbness, this condition can lead to other major problems. One of the most common is the loss of a toe, foot or leg. People are at risk for developing sores on these parts of their bodies. The sores may cause severe infections. Someone may have to get a body part removed if the infection is bad enough.

People can also develop joint damage. They might not be able to control their bladders. Their digestive systems may not work normally. People with neuropathy might not be able to notice blood sugar or blood pressure changes.

Steps you can take to prevent diabetic neuropathy

The best way to prevent diabetic neuropathy is by keeping an eye on your blood sugar. If you've been diagnosed with diabetes, purchase an at-home monitor. That way, you can make sure your blood sugar stays within the target range. Additionally, have your doctor check your A1C levels twice per year with a blood test.

For peripheral neuropathy, practicing good foot care can help prevent some of the effects of diabetic neuropathy. This includes checking your feet every day to make sure you don't have blisters or other sores. Keep your feet clean and dry. This prevents bacteria and fungus from growing. Also, wear shoes that fit properly and comfortably. This limits your risk for injuring your feet from loss of feeling.

Diabetic neuropathy affects people in several ways and can lead to more dangerous symptoms. If you notice anything unusual going on with your hands or feet, check in with your doctor. The earlier you get treated, the better chance you have of preventing amputation.

Visit [Mercy.com](https://www.mercy.com) to schedule an appointment with a primary care doctor.

We're here to talk about your diabetes and any symptoms you may be experiencing.

