

Damage to nervous system sometimes hard to detect

Peripheral Neuropathy is the term used to describe disorders of the peripheral nerves. Even though 10 to 20 million people in the country suffer with PN, information is hard to come by.

About 50 percent of diabetics will develop the condition. Many people using statin pills ("cholesterol drugs") will be affected by this mysterious and under-recognized malady. Neuropathy means "disease or abnormality of the nervous system," which is not a very helpful definition.

We think of neuropathy as any damage to the nervous system. Carpal tunnel syndrome, herniated discs and strokes are all examples of insults to different areas of the nervous system, all with different symptoms. Diabetes is a systemic disease that affects all nerves of the body from the brain, eyes and small nerves of the heart and digestive system, to the nerves in the hands, feet and legs. The peripheral nervous system is made up of the nerves that branch out from the spinal cord to all parts of the body.

SYMPTOMS

There are two types of symptoms with peripheral neuropathy, negative and positive. Negative signs, which come first, occur when damage to the nervous system brings about a loss of a particular function, for example, loss of reflexes, loss of strength or loss of sensation leading to numbness.

But these are often not detect-

able to the patient, because the brain makes up the difference in these losses. Only after some time do the sick and damaged nerves create the positive signs of neuropathy: tingling, burning, biting, stabbing and shooting pain. This too is a reaction of the brain and nervous system. Unfortunately, this overreaction tears apart the fiber of patients' lives.

Each patient will describe their pain in their own individual language of "pain." This can easily confuse a doctor not trained in the recognition and treatment of this condition. So the patient usually continues to suffer, going from doctor to doctor, to stronger and stronger doses of pills until he is either completely drugged up and out of it, or lost in his own world of suffering.

Some neuropathies come on suddenly, others over many years. Some people are affected only by a weakness in the arms and/or legs, which leads to difficulty standing, walking or getting out of a chair. The loss of sensation in the feet, ankles and toes contributes to patients not having a "good sense" of where their feet are in space, touching the ground. This causes them to fall very easily. These unrecognized sensory losses can only be detected with the proper clinical exam.

CHALLENGES

Some patients with PN will eventually become unable to walk at all. Others start with a

tingling, pinprick feeling that turns into deep, sharp, stabbing pains and burning, electric shocks.

These debilitating symptoms can be at their worst at night while trying to get to sleep, because the pain never goes away. In fact, once started, it only gets worse.

Currently, ordinary medicine has no cure for PN. The extremely powerful drugs dispensed to patients for this condition do not treat the nerve damage. They numb the brain to numb the pain. Most patients cannot tolerate a drugged existence but feel they have no other option against this horrifying pain.

Our office HealthSource of Lakewood offers solutions. We are a proud member of Neuropathy Treatment Centers of America (NTCA), which for the past 15 years has studied PN and developed a multipronged approach that has a 92 percent patient satisfaction with care in as little as three to four weeks. It's a program that only members of NTCA use.

This gives us a set of knowledge and tools that have been tested, researched and found to be effective. Our "Peripheral Neuropathy Pain Treatment Program" is available for anyone suffering from the pain of PN through HealthSource of Lakewood, 963 S. Kipling Parkway, 303-985-5540.

This article was submitted by HealthSource of Lakewood.