

## neuropathic pain

If you or someone you know suffers from neuropathic pain, it is important to realise that there are medicines and effective approaches to treatment are available.

Neuropathic pain is difficult to treat as it responds poorly to standard pain treatments. For some people, if the pain is left without effective treatment it can lead to serious disability. Therefore, it is very important to seek early treatment and stop the neuropathic pain becoming irreversibly chronic.

## what is neuropathic pain?

The term neuropathic pain comes from the Greek *neuro*, meaning nerves, and *pathy*, meaning abnormality.

People usually think of pain as having some physical cause. Get rid of the cause, and the pain goes away. However, nerves themselves can also generate pain.

This type of pain is usually long-lasting and persistent which makes it very difficult for sufferers to live with. It can be puzzling and frustrating for people who have it and for doctors who treat it.

## how common is neuropathic pain?

Neuropathic pain is an important component of many chronic pain conditions and is caused by drug-, disease-, or injury-induced damage or dysfunction in the nervous system.

Neuropathic pain features are common in patients with:

Trigeminal Neuralgia	Complex Regional Pain Syndrome
Spinal Cord Injuries	Post Traumatic Neuropathy
Phantom Limb Pain	Post Surgical Neuropathy
Multiple Sclerosis	Post Herpetic Neuralgia
Post Stroke Pain	Peripheral Neuropathy
Fibromyalgia	Diabetic Neuropathy
Low Back Pain	Cancer-Related Pain
Nerve Entrapment	

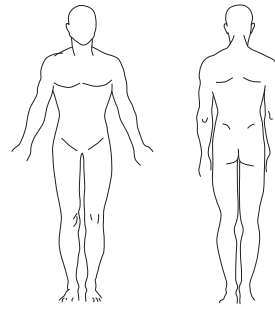
## idpain questionnaire - step one

Do you experience pain other than a headache or migraine?  Yes  No

If you answer Yes, continue.

If you answer No, you should still talk to your doctor about your pain symptoms.

On the diagram below, shade in the areas where you feel pain. If you have more than one painful area, circle the area that bothers you most.



## step two

Step two will help you clearly describe the type of pain you are feeling to your doctor.

First, complete the questions below.

When you have finished, add up the points for your total score. If you score 2 or more, talk to your doctor about whether you may have nerve pain.

Minimum total score = -1

Maximum total score = 5

1. Did the pain feel like pins and needles?  Yes (+1pt)  No (0pts)
2. Did the pain feel hot/burning?  Yes (+1pt)  No (0pts)
3. Did the pain feel numb?  Yes (+1pt)  No (0pts)
4. Did the pain feel like electric shocks?  Yes (+1pt)  No (0pts)
5. Is the pain worse with the touch of clothing/bedsheets?  Yes (+1pt)  No (0pts)
6. Is the pain limited to your joints?  Yes (+1pt)  No (0pts)

total score



understanding  
neuropathic pain

## what causes neuropathic pain?

Neuropathic pain is caused by damage or dysfunction of nerves. This can occur as a result of many things. Some of the most common causes of neuropathic pain are diabetes, shingles, nerve entrapments, back/neck injuries and cancer.

For many conditions, the exact causes of neuropathic pain are not fully understood. Whatever the cause, if you are in pain, you should discuss your symptoms with your doctor.

## what are the symptoms of neuropathic pain?

People with neuropathic pain feel a variety of pain types; some words often used to describe their pain are:

Deep Aching	Electrical Shooting Sensation
Numbness	Sensation of Extreme Cold
Squeezing	Walking on Broken Glass
Cramping	Ants Walking on Skin
Spasms	Pins and Needles
Burning	Stabbing
Itching	Tingling

Neuropathic pain varies a great deal and therefore different people will experience different combination of sensations of pain.

One of the hallmarks of neuropathic pain is called 'allodynia', pain resulting from a stimulus that does not usually cause pain. For example, people may feel pain as a result of a light touch to the skin. This can make everyday activities, such as walking or dressing, extremely painful. In some individuals, their sleep is affected by the pain.

To make the correct diagnosis, your doctor needs a clear description of what you are feeling. The **idpain** is a short self assessment questionnaire designed to help you better communicate your pain symptoms to your doctor. A condensed copy of the **idpain** questionnaire is included at the back of this pamphlet. Fill the questionnaire and show it to your doctor.

## how is neuropathic pain treated?

Neuropathic pain usually does not respond to standard pain-relieving medications. In the past 10 years there has been a great deal of progress in our understanding of what causes neuropathic pain. This has led to the development of various ways to successfully treat the condition. The choice of treatment – and treatment success – will vary depending on the individual's condition and his or her response to therapy.

Several classes of medication effectively treat neuropathic pain by modulating the channels that transmit chemical messages to the brain. Modulating these pain pathways can effectively reduce pain to a level that can be tolerated.

Unfortunately, some of these neuropathic pain medications are not subsidised through the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme and could cost between \$3 – \$6 per day. You should discuss your treatment options with your doctor.

## what other treatments are useful?

People with neuropathic pain can often feel depressed and upset as a result of the stress that their pain can put on daily activities and relationships.

The effective treatment of neuropathic pain will involve a combination of approaches. In addition to medications, there are a number of non-medicinal approaches that can be of benefit. These include:

### Psychotherapy

Psychological therapy can help sufferers reduce the stress associated with their pain. Relaxation/meditation techniques, coping mechanisms and self-monitoring skills helps reduce the psychological impact of pain.

### Physical therapies

Exercise and physiotherapy techniques such as hydrotherapy, massage, applying heat and cold etc can also help to strengthen or recondition muscles. Occupational therapy may also be helpful in allowing pain sufferers to resume their normal daily activities.

Doctors will use a combination of these approaches to help patients manage their pain. The types of treatments used will vary depending on the needs of the individual patient.

## who else can help?

Sharing experiences and fears with others can often help you feel better. Your healthcare professional may recommend organisations, or you may wish to contact one of the groups on the following list.

### Palliative Care Australia

Palliative Care Australia provides help and information for people living with a terminal illness and for their families and friends.

Telephone: (02) 6232 4433  
www.pallcare.org.au

### Diabetes Australia

Diabetes Australia provides support and advice for people living with diabetes and their families.

ACT: (02) 6288 9830  
NSW: 1300 136 588  
NT: (08) 8927 8488 or 08 8927 8482  
Qld: 1800 177055  
SA: (08) 8234 1977  
TAS: (03) 6234 5223 or 1800 640 862  
Vic: (03) 9654 8777 or 1800 640 862  
WA: (08) 9325 7699  
www.diabetesaustralia.com.au

### Multiple Sclerosis Australia

Multiple Sclerosis Australia has offices in each state and can provide support, counselling, information resources and more. Toll free number (all states except VIC): 1800 816 113  
Toll free number (VIC only): 1800 287 367  
www.msaustralia.org.au

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