Pain, Neuropathic
(Peripheral Neuropathy, Peripheral Neuritis)

We often think that pain has a physical cause. If we get rid of the cause, the pain should go away. However, nerves themselves can also cause pain. This pain often does not go away easily. It is called neuropathic pain, which means nerve abnormality. It may be difficult to understand for the patients who have it and for the treating caregivers.

Neuropathic pain may be caused by an injury or failure of the nervous system. The pain is often caused by an injury, but this injury may or may not be the cause of actual damage to the nervous system. Nerves can be penetrated or squashed by tumors, strangled by scar tissue, or become inflamed (a soreness or redness) caused by infection. The pain frequently has burning, stabbing, or piercing sensations like an electric shock.

Lasting pain from a non-painful thing such as a light touch is common with neuropathic pain. Pain may persist for months or years following the healing of damaged tissues. When this happens, pain signals no longer sound an alarm about current injuries or injuries about to happen. Instead, the alarm system itself is not working correctly.

Neuropathic pain is often long lasting, and tends not to get better when treated with opioids (narcotic types of pain medication). It may respond well to other drugs such as anti-seizure and anti-depressant medications. Usually, neuropathic problems do not completely go away, but partial improvement is often possible with proper treatment.

CHARACTERISTICS OF NEUROPATHY AND CHRONIC BACK PAIN

Back pain or other pain that is caused by neuropathy is typically described as:

- Severe, sharp, electric shock-like, shooting, lightening-like.
- Deep burning or deep cold.
- Persistent numbness, tingling, or weakness.
- Traveling along the nerve path into the arms, hands, legs or feet.
- Neuropathy may be characterized by pain resulting from light touch or other stimulus that would not usually cause pain. There may also be increased sensitivity to something that would normally cause pain, such as. a pinprick. Neuropathy can result from any type of pain that compresses a nerve.

Neuropathic pain often seems to have no cause. The diagnosis is made when no other cause is found. It responds poorly to standard pain treatment. It may get worse instead of better over time. For some people, it can lead to serious disability.

TREATMENT

Your caregivers have large numbers of medications available to treat you. They, along with you, will select the medications which best allow you to live a normal life. Do not be discouraged if you do not get immediate relief. Sometimes different medications or a combination of medications will be tried before you receive the benefits you are hoping for.

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