

Treatment of Peripheral Neuropathy



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sion or nerve entrapment. Hypothyroidism, nutritional deficiencies (Vitamins B1, B5, B6, Vitamin E), nutritional toxicities (B6), diabetes, AIDS, lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, alcoholism, metal toxicity, some cancers, some rare genetic disorders and some types of prescription drugs may also cause peripheral neuropathy. When talking to your doctor about peripheral neuropathy, it's important that they take a detailed history to ensure all possible causes of the neuropathy are addressed.

As a chiropractor, the most common cases of peripheral neuropathy that I diagnose are due to nerves getting affected by compression (e.g. sciatica) or entrapment issues (e.g. carpal tunnel syndrome). In many of these patients, certain positions may aggravate their condition. There may be swelling of a joint capsule, osteoarthritic inflammation at a joint or stenosis of a joint or even swelling of soft tissue that causes the nerve pressure. Often, changing position will relieve that pressure. In these instances, treating to regain joint and/or soft tissue integrity helps these patients.

Frequently, there are instances where the neuropathy has a more

For three to eight percent of the American population, an abnormal sensation in the hands, feet or legs, which is often worse at night, will be diagnosed as 'peripheral neuropathy.' As we age, this diagnosis becomes more prevalent. The most common peripheral neuropathy is diabetic neuropathy, which may be present in up to two-thirds of diabetics. The symptoms of peripheral neuropathy may include numbness, tingling, prickling, cramping, burning or even sharp pain. The involved body part may be very sensitive to touch, and in severe cases, muscle weakness, muscle wasting, loss of balance or even loss of function may occur. Often the feet and legs are more affected by peripheral neuropathy, especially when the cause of the neuropathy something other than nerves getting pinched or entrapped as a result of joint or soft tissues issues.

Peripheral neuropathy is a catch all term. Literally meaning "disease of a distant nerve," this label has no distinct cause or treatment. Peripheral neuropathy describes abnormal nerve function that occurs when nerve messages to and from the brain and spinal cord become impaired. Factors that can contribute to peripheral neuropathy include spinal nerve pressure, non-spinal joint and soft tissues causing nerve compres-



Dr. Erik Brown and Dr. Lisa Pratt

sion or nerve entrapment. At that point, we may have to treat for several issues to resolve it. For instance, Jane had burning pain in both legs, although it was worse in her feet and was much worse at night in bed. She was diagnosed with osteoarthritis and stenosis of her low back, although she had minimal back pain. She had also been diagnosed as type II diabetic. Her

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doctor called her peripheral neuropathy "diabetic neuropathy." Low force spinal adjusting took care of most of the leg burning, but Jane still complained about night time foot burning although it was less severe than when

A detailed history is important in helping us establish a possible vitamin deficiency. Certain medications for instance, may predispose patients to Vitamin B deficiencies like Jane's. Knowing that a patient is on birth control, hormone replacement therapy, diuretics or some seizure and asthma medications gives us a heads up that a component of the nerve symptoms may be nutritionally related.



Teresa Heaton, office manager and Erika Themely Chiropractic Assistant

You may wonder why we actually tested before we used a B vitamin supplement. Some B vitamin toxicities will also cause neurologic symptoms. By testing blood levels we know if there is deficiency or toxicity, and we can then treat appropriately. (In the past 6 months we have seen two cases of

she initially started care. Testing her Vitamin B levels revealed that she was B vitamin deficient (B1, B5 and B6). The same diet that had caused her type II diabetes had left her with a long term B vitamin deficiency. Short term treatment required adding an adequate B supplement and the foot pain resolved in several weeks. Long term treatment involved helping Jane change her diet so she could do a better job of obtaining her B vitamins through foods. Jane was able to resolve her diabetic neuropathy and simultaneously, she lowered her blood sugar, reducing her need for medication. In this case, the cause of Jane's neuropathy was not only spinal but nutritional.

B vitamin toxicity as a cause of peripheral symptoms.)

In traditional Chinese medicine, peripheral neuropathy is a condition of dampness that can obstruct energy flow. Treating the cause entails having knowledge of why the dampness is accumulating. We would treat for the cause of the dampness while also treating the obstructed flow. Dampness also has a dietary cause. Often with a patient getting acupuncture for peripheral neuropathy, we are still addressing weight issues, alcohol and sugar issues and the eating of a more balanced diet. With acupuncture, points are often needed on the involved limb but may include other body or back points.

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