



Beginner's guide

DIABETIC NEUROPATHY

One of the most common complications associated with diabetes, diabetic neuropathy refers to nerve damage caused by high glucose levels over a long period of time. There are two main types: peripheral, which causes pain or numbness in the hands, feet, legs, and arms; and autonomic, the dulling of nerves that control the gastrointestinal tract, bowel, bladder, and other organs.

Roughly half of all people with diabetes have some form of nerve damage.

—American Diabetes Association

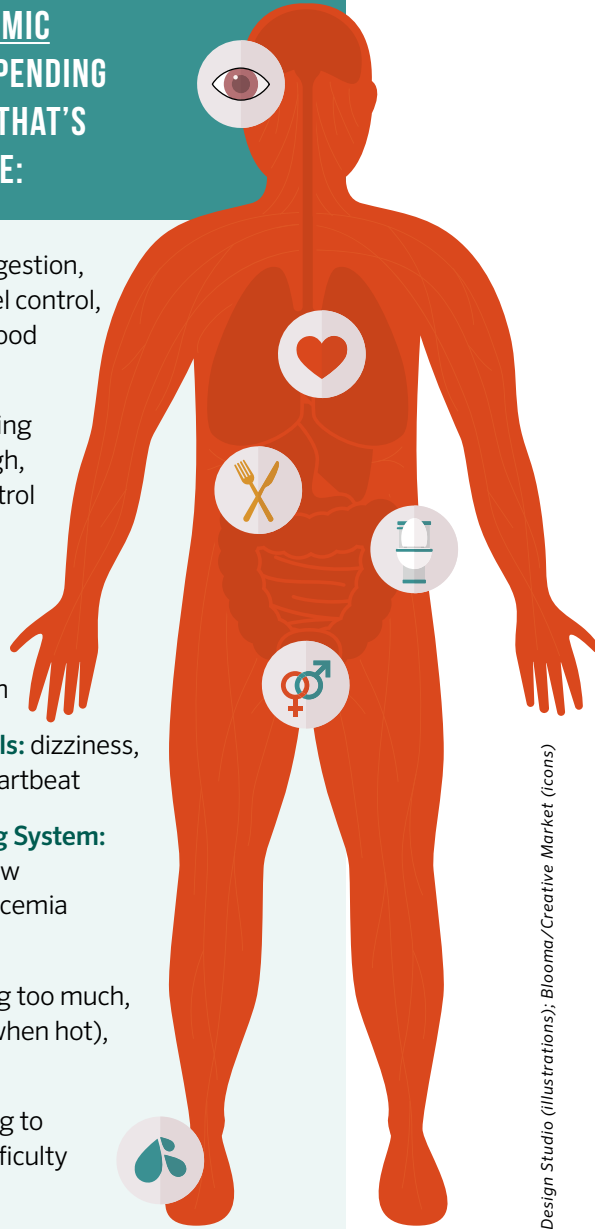
UP TO **50%**

OF PEOPLE WITH PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY HAVE NO SYMPTOMS.

—American Diabetes Association 2019 Standards of Medical Care in Diabetes

SYMPTOMS OF AUTONOMIC NEUROPATHY VARY DEPENDING ON THE BODY SYSTEM THAT'S AFFECTED AND INCLUDE:

- Digestive System:** indigestion, heartburn, loss of bowel control, and trouble digesting food (gastroparesis)
- Urinary System:** urinating very often or not enough, and loss of bladder control
- Sex Organs:** erectile dysfunction in men; vaginal dryness, loss of arousal, or problems with orgasms in women
- Heart and Blood Vessels:** dizziness, fainting, and a rapid heartbeat
- Hypoglycemia Warning System:** difficulty recognizing low blood glucose (hypoglycemia unawareness)
- Sweat Glands:** sweating too much, sweating rarely (even when hot), and dry feet
- Eyes:** difficulty adjusting to changes in light and difficulty driving at night



Becca Koebrick/Becca Koebrick Design Studio (illustrations), Blooma/Creative Market (icons)

FOOT CARE TIPS

Peripheral neuropathy can lower your ability to feel pain, so you may not realize you have a cut or scrape, especially on the bottoms of your feet. Untreated wounds can become infected and, in some cases, may lead to amputation. If you have neuropathy that affects your feet, follow these tips to keep your feet safe:

Avoid going barefoot.

Inspect your feet daily for cuts, blisters, or red spots.

Elevate your feet when sitting to increase blood flow, which helps wound healing.

Use moisturizer on the tops and bottoms of your feet. Dry skin may crack, raising the risk for infection. But skip the lotion between your toes—moisturizing there can encourage fungal growth.

Wash your feet in warm water. Hot water could burn your skin.

Trim your toenails to prevent ingrown nails, which can lead to infection.

Get a complete foot exam from your doctor every year.

SEE YOUR DOCTOR IF YOU EXPERIENCE ANY SYMPTOMS OF PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY, SUCH AS:

- Tingling that generally begins in your feet
- Numbness or lack of sensation in your hands or feet
- Extreme cold or hot sensation in your hands or feet
- Muscle weakness in your feet and legs
- Difficulty balancing while walking

These symptoms may become more noticeable at night.

GET SCREENED for peripheral neuropathy

TYPE 1 DIABETES

Five years after a diagnosis of type 1 and at least annually after your initial screening

TYPE 2 DIABETES

Immediately after a diagnosis of type 2 and at least annually after your initial screening

WHETHER YOU HAVE PERIPHERAL OR AUTONOMIC NEUROPATHY, THE TREATMENT IS THE SAME:



Maintain a healthy weight.



Be physically active most days of the week.



Take medication for nerve pain or specific autonomic symptoms.



Keep blood glucose in check.



CAN NEUROPATHY BE REVERSED?

Neuropathy has no known cure, but proper glucose management can help prevent or delay its development, particularly for those with type 1 diabetes, and may lessen some symptoms. If your blood glucose isn't within your goal range, work with your diabetes care team to improve it.



HOW IS AUTONOMIC NEUROPATHY DIAGNOSED?

Your doctor can perform a physical exam if you're showing symptoms of autonomic neuropathy and may also recommend breathing, gastrointestinal, bladder, sweat, or blood pressure tests.