

Tracking Down an Elusive Neurological Disease

Millions Remain Undiagnosed

(NAPSA)—Recent research may mean relief for millions suffering from a neglected and frequently misdiagnosed disease that causes progressive, debilitating pain. Although more than 20 million Americans have peripheral neuropathy, often neither they nor their doctors know what it is. The neurological disorder, characterized by numbness, tingling or a burning sensation in the toes, feet or legs, is extremely common, yet extraordinarily difficult to diagnose, so treatment is often delayed.

Part of the problem is that in many cases, the cause is idiopathic, or unknown. Other causes include diabetes (nearly 60 percent of diabetics suffer from the disorder), autoimmune diseases, rheumatoid arthritis, exposure to toxic substances, cancer, use of certain medications such as chemotherapy, viral and bacterial infections.

The good news: “With accurate diagnosis and proper treatment, the symptoms of peripheral neuropathy can often be managed and sometimes eliminated,” according to Dr. Raymond P. Roos, professor and chairman, Department of Neurology and faculty member, Jack Miller Center for Peripheral Neuropathy at the University of Chicago. The Center was established in 2000 to not only treat patients, but diligently search for a cure for this common but elusive disease.



It's important, however, to make the diagnosis in the early stages of the disease. “Once the nerve damage is stopped, the nerves may then regenerate. The less the damage, the better the recovery, so the earlier peripheral neuropathy is diagnosed, the more effective therapy can be,” says Dr. Roos.

Treatment, which depends on the type of neuropathy and the underlying cause, can involve close regulation of blood sugar levels for diabetic neuropathy, intravenous gammaglobulin or corticosteroids for autoimmune diseases, and pain medication to treat the constant discomfort that accompanies peripheral neuropathy. In addition, physical therapy can slow the progression of the disease.

So if any of the symptoms in the accompanying checklist seem all too familiar to you, make an appointment promptly with your physician. The earlier peripheral

neuropathy is diagnosed, the earlier the damage can be slowed or stopped. To learn more about the disorder online, visit the experts at <http://peripheralneuropathy.bsd.uchicago.edu>.

Do You Have Any Of These Symptoms Of Peripheral Neuropathy?

- Weakness in the arms or legs
- Numbness or tingling in the toes, feet or legs
- A sensation of wearing an invisible glove or sock
- Burning sensation or freezing-like pain
- Sharp, jabbing or electric-like pain
- Extreme sensitivity to touch
- Difficulty sleeping because of feet and leg pain
- Loss of balance and coordination
- Muscle weakness
- Difficulty walking or moving the arms
- Abnormalities in blood pressure and pulse

