**Neuropathy**

**What is it?**

The medical term for damage to a nerve is neuropathy. Damage that affects the nerves in the arms or legs is called peripheral neuropathy. This term usually refers to damage to more than one nerve.

The nervous system consists of the brain, the spinal cord, and nerves. Nerves are tiny fibers that are present everywhere in the body. They carry signals to and from the brain. Nerves make it possible for a person to feel and to move.

There are many different types of peripheral neuropathy:

. "Glove and stocking" pattern. The person loses feeling and has weakness in both hands and feet. This is the most common type.

. Weakness and loss of feeling in both arms and/or both legs.

. Weakness and loss of feeling in just one limb.

. Loss of feeling in just one limb.

. Weakness in just one limb.

**What is the cause?**

Many things can damage nerves.

"Glove and stocking" nerve damage is most commonly caused by diabetes. Most people who have had diabetes for 10 years or more have some nerve damage. Kidney failure and liver problems can cause this type of nerve damage. It is also often seen in inflammatory illnesses like lupus, gout, or rheumatoid arthritis. Several medicines can cause this problem. It can be a sign of a lack of vitamin B12 or vitamin E or from generally poor nutrition. This type of nerve damage can also be passed down in families.

Peripheral neuropathy can be caused by chronic intoxication with alcohol, or heavy metals like lead or arsenic.

Weakness and loss of feeling in both legs or both arms can be a sign of illness.

Weakness or loss of feeling in one limb usually means that just one nerve has been damaged. This is often from an injury or overuse of a joint.

Sometimes we do not know what is causing the problem.

**What are the symptoms?**

You may have tingling or numbness in one or both hands or feet. It may occur in the arms or legs. The tingling and numbness may come and go. You may have a burning pain along the nerves. You may have a "pulling" or "drawing" sensation in your legs. You may have muscle cramps. It may be hard for you to use the muscles in the area. You may notice that the muscles seem smaller or weaker.

If you have loss of feeling, you may not feel it when you hurt yourself. You may have a sore and not know when or how it started.

**How is it treated?**

How we will treat your nerve damage will depend on what is causing it. We will do tests first. If a disease or injury is affecting your nerves, we will treat that. We may give you medicine to relieve pain. There are many different types of medicine that help treat the pain. We may need to change a medicine you are on. Physical therapy may be helpful in some cases. We may suggest changes in diet or how you use a joint.

**What can I expect?**

Some types of nerve damage can be treated. You may recover full feeling and use of the affected area. Other types of nerve damage are chronic. Once we know what is causing your nerve damage, we can give you a better idea of what to expect.

When a part of your body has lost feeling, it is hard to protect it from injury. Numb feet are particularly at risk of damage and slow to heal after injury. Always wear shoes that fit well and good cotton socks. Inspect your feet nightly for any signs of pressure or injury. Set your house water heater no higher than 120 degrees F. Check your bath temperature before getting in.

**What to watch for.**

Seek medical care right away if you suddenly cannot feel or move part of your body. Call us about any increase in pain, numbness, or tingling. Let us know if you feel light-headed when you stand up after lying down or sitting. Let us know if you start having diarrhea or problems with holding your urine. Call us if you develop other new symptoms. Call us if you notice any injury or sore to your feet.