

## What is Peripheral Neuropathy?

Peripheral neuropathy describes damage to the peripheral nervous system, which transmits information from the brain and spinal cord to every other part of the body. “Peripheral” is defined as nerves further out from the center of the body. “Neuro” defined as nerves and “Pathy” means abnormal. In most cases, peripheral neuropathy is secondary to conditions including diabetes, lupus, lyme disease, syphilis, Gullian-Barre syndrome, rheumatoid arthritis, scleroderma, alcoholism, nutritional deficiencies, AIDS, or poisoning from heavy metals, chemotherapy, or various drugs. Other causes include compression or entrapment (carpal tunnel syndrome), direct physical injury to a nerve (trauma), penetrated injuries, fractures or dislocated bones, pressure involving superficial nerves (ulna or radial) which can result from prolonged use of crutches or staying in same position, tumor, intraneural hemorrhage, exposure to cold, radiation or atherosclerosis. It is a syndrome which includes symptoms of numbness, tingling, pricking sensations, sensitivity to touch, burning pain, and muscle weakness and atrophy of the arms and legs. The feet and legs are likely to be affected before the hands and arms.

### Symptoms of peripheral neuropathy

The symptoms depend on which types of nerves are affected and may include:

- Numbness or insensitivity to pain or temperature
- a tingling, burning, or prickling sensation
- sharp, burning pain or cramps
- extreme sensitivity to touch, even a light touch

- loss of balance and coordination
- muscle weakness
- muscle wasting
- paralysis These symptoms are often worse at night. Many people have signs of neuropathy upon examination but have no symptoms at all.

**How can acupuncture treat peripheral neuropathy?**

Traditional Chinese medicine teaches that Peripheral neuropathy is due to dampness moving to the limbs, where it obstructs the flow of Qi (energy) and Blood within them. The treatment is twofold, to treat the underlying factor that is causing this dampness to accumulate and to directly facilitate the circulation of Qi and Blood in the affected area. By improving the circulation, the nerve tissues of the affected area can be nourished to repair the nerve functions and reduce pain. Peripheral neuropathy is a symptom for many different patterns of disharmony within the body. Oriental Medicine aims to treat each individual uniquely depending on what caused the neuropathy and how it manifests. Your acupuncturist may do an interview and ask questions about how, what, where and when you feel pain, perspire, sleep, eat, drink and exercise, to name a few. The practitioner may also feel the pulse and observing the tongue. This interview and physical examination will help create a clear picture on which your practitioners can create a treatment plan specifically for you. In addition to acupuncture, other methods such as transcutaneous electronic nerve stimulation (TENS), which uses small amounts of electricity to block pain signals, cutaneous acupuncture, herbal and physical

therapy may be combined to achieve faster results.

#### **What is Cutaneous Acupuncture?**

Cutaneous Acupuncture is the use of acupuncture needles to stimulate an area superficially by tapping to promote the smooth flow of Qi and Blood. The Plum blossom needle and the Seven-Star needle are special tools that are composed of a small bunch of needles attached to a handle like a hammer or broom. They are often used in the treatment of peripheral neuropathy. The affected area would be lightly tapped starting at the toes or fingers and then up the legs and arms. Plastic, disposable plum blossom needles or seven-star needles are available for treatment at home.

#### **What will an Acupuncture Treatment feel like?**

There seems to be little sensitivity to the insertion of acupuncture needles. They are so thin that several acupuncture needles can go into the middle of a hypodermic needle. Occasionally, there is a brief moment of discomfort as the needle penetrates the skin, but once the needles are in place, most people relax and even fall asleep for the duration of the treatment. The length, number and frequency of treatments will vary. Typical treatments last from five to 30 minutes, with the patient being treated one or two times a week. Some symptoms are relieved after the first treatment, while more severe or chronic ailments often require multiple treatments. The style of acupuncture that your acupuncturist has been trained in will play a roll in length of treatment, number of points used and frequency of visits.

### What Lifestyle and Dietary Changes Should I Make?

Adopting healthy habits such as maintaining optimal weight, avoiding exposure to toxins, following a physician-supervised exercise program, eating a balanced diet, correcting vitamin deficiencies, and limiting or avoiding alcohol consumption can reduce the physical and emotional effects of peripheral neuropathy. Consider relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, self-hypnosis or biofeedback. These can help you learn to control the external factors that trigger pain.