



MANAGING NEUROPATHY PAIN

By Henry Lew, psychologist

If our diabetes is not well controlled, nerve damage can occur over time. We may experience numbness, burning or tingling sensations of pain in parts of our body. This is referred to as **neuropathy pain**.

The prevention and management of neuropathy pain is through the medical management and control of blood glucose levels. And, in some instances, medication for neuropathy pain.

Although, neuropathy pain can be managed, a lot of patients typically delay seeking help. They think that it is just an ordinary muscular pain that will eventually go away. In fact, research has shown that many patients seek help only seven years after they experience the pain.

You do not need to suffer in silence for such a long period.

Regular Follow Ups With Your Medical Team

Neuropathy pain may develop slowly and gradually. And it is usually detected through a series of medical examinations and tests. Keep to your regular follow up appointments with your doctors and nurses. They will not only be able to help you better monitor and control your blood glucose levels, but they will also be able to help you monitor any development of neuropathy pain.

In addition, conditions like high blood, high cholesterol and obesity may also contribute and increase the risk of developing nerve damage and pain. Hence, management of our chronic illnesses in general is essential.

Lifestyle Behavioural Changes

Besides working with medical professionals, we can play a part in our daily life. This includes having a healthy diet, regular exercise, regular monitoring our glucose levels and taking our medication.

Reducing or abstaining from behaviours that increase the risk of developing neuropathy pain like smoking and alcohol intake will also be helpful.

Managing Our Catastrophic Thinking

For most people, a simple prick already elicits not only pain but also some level of distress. Patients experiencing chronic neuropathy pain may experience emotional distress. And it may be inevitable that they develop catastrophic thoughts.

Catastrophic thoughts are thoughts that make things look very hopeless, make the person very helpless and keep repeating in the person's mind, even though he or she does not want to think about them intentionally. Some examples include: "I cannot do anything"; "I am worthless"; "There is no hope"; "No one needs me".

Research has show that catastrophic thoughts not only make the person more emotionally distressed, but they also intensify the pain experience. Hence, managing these thoughts can help to alleviate the emotional distress due to pain and therefore, help us to manage the pain experience better.

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One of the ways to manage these thoughts includes developing alternative coping thoughts.

Coping thoughts are fairly different from "positive thinking". Its working principle is to recognise first the difficult situation one is in, before thinking positively. That seems to be very helpful to many people. Some examples include:

Catastrophic Thoughts	Coping Thoughts	Positive Thoughts
I cannot do anything.	I may not be able to everything I used to do, but there are still things I can do.	I can do it. I must do it.
I am worthless.	Although there are times I feel worthless, I still have value .	I am worthy.
There is no hope.	Change is possible, there is hope, I can start with the smallest thing first.	There is hope.

Notice the difference between coping thoughts and positive thoughts. This does not mean coping thoughts replace the positive thoughts we often use; it just means that we have another way of dealing with our catastrophic thoughts.

Managing our emotion and thoughts may not cure us of the pain, but it will help us to experience a better quality of life, moment to moment.

There are many other ways to increase your quality of life. Some of these include problem solving and pacing your activities. But one thing is clear.

You are not alone in managing your neuropathy pain.

Talk to your healthcare professional for support.