

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Neuropathic Pain

Table of Contents:

This FAQ will cover the following contents on the listed pages. You can hover over each topic, press Ctrl and click to go directly to the selected question.

What is a neuralgia?	2
How are neuralgias treated?	2
What are common side effects of anticonvulsants?	2
What are common side effects of antidepressants?	3
What can I expect from a nerve block?	3
Do I need nerve release surgery?	3
Resources for management of neuropathic pain	4

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Neuropathic Pain

What is a neuralgia?

Nerves carry electrical signals around different areas of the body. Nerves have two functions. One is to elicit an action, like moving your fingers, bending your elbow or walking. The other function is to allow you to feel sensations like hot, cold, pressure and pain, coming from the skin and internal organs. A nerve is like a cable made up of multiple wires. The wires are called axons. Think of nerves as the electrical circuit of the body. Nerves can get injured by getting cut, crushed, or squeezed. This is called nerve compression or entrapment. When a neuron is injured, the resulting pain is felt along the area where the nerve is located. The pain is typically described as hot, burning, tingling, electrical or 'raw skin' sensation. This type of pain is called a neuralgia. The pain can start even when light touch is applied to the area surrounding that neuron. The pain gets better when the area is not touched or when ice is applied to that area.

How are neuralgias treated?

The pain of neuralgias can be managed with pain medications. Sometimes, antidepressants and anti-seizure medications (anti-convulsant) can also help. When medications are not enough the doctor may inject anesthetic fluid around the nerve. This is called a nerve block. At other times, electrical current can be used to stimulate the nerve. This is called neurostimulation. Sometime the nerve is interrupted with surgery, or cautery. These procedures are called nerve transection and nerve ablation. If a nerve is being squeezed or crushed by scar tissue, the surgeons can release the nerve in a procedure called nerve decompression.

What are common side effects of anticonvulsants?

Gabapentin and pregabalin are anticonvulsants frequently used to help with nerve pain. They help by decreasing the nerve sensitivity. These medications are usually started by your doctor and the dose is gradually increased, until the desired effect is achieved. Common side effects of these medications include dizziness, drowsiness, fatigue, weight gain, and difficulty with short term memory. Anticonvulsants should not be used with opioid pain medications because this combination can lead to difficulty with breathing. These medications should only be used under the supervision of a healthcare professional.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Neuropathic Pain

What are common side effects of antidepressants?

Sometimes antidepressants are used to treat nerve pain. Although antidepressants are effective at improving mood, they are not very effective in treating pain. Antidepressants can also have side effects like constipation, dry eyes, blurry vision, urinary, and irregular heartbeat, especially in older patients. Just like with anticonvulsants, antidepressants are started at a lower dose and slowly increased over time. If you use antidepressants for mood and pain control, you should be under the supervision of a doctor who closely monitors your side effects.

What can I expect from a nerve block?

Nerve blocks are done to confirm that the pain arising from a nerve (neuralgia). Nerve blocks are injections where numbing medications are injected around the nerve to decrease the sensation that is being felt by that nerve. The procedure can be done by your doctor with imaging by using an ultrasound or a CAT scan, or it can be done without imaging by using body landmarks. The injection is uncomfortable to start, but as soon as the numbing medication starts working, the pain goes away. After the injection is done, the doctor will ask you if you still have pain, burning, tingling, or a hot sensation, in the area around the nerve. If the pain does not get better, it means the pain is not coming from the nerve. Instead it might be coming from the tissues and organs around the nerves. If the first nerve block works to numb the pain, your doctor may offer you repeat injections for pain management. Depending on the medication used, the nerve block effect can last from 2-9 hrs.

Do I need nerve release surgery?

Neuralgia, nerve pain, can happen when a nerve is compressed or trapped by scar tissue from old injuries or surgeries. In these cases, a surgery can be done to remove the scar tissue and release the nerve. Unfortunately, this type of surgery does not always help. Healing from this type of surgery may take months to years, depending on the degree of injury. After surgery, medications, injections, and physical therapy may still be needed, so you should discuss the recovery process with your surgeon.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Neuropathic Pain

Resources for management of neuropathic pain

International Pelvic Pain Society Patient Education Pamphlets:

www.pelvicpain.org

Health organization for pudendal education: www.pudendalhope.info