

The Natural Pharmacy Newsletter

Wellspring Custom Pharmacy

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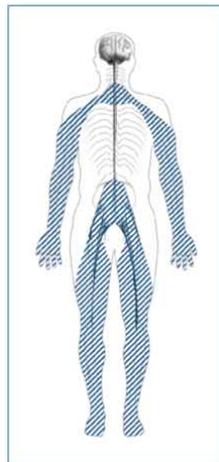
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In The News

by Brad Roseborough, R.Ph.

New Considerations in the Treatment of Neuropathy

Neuropathy is a painful change in sensation of the peripheral nerves that involves inflammation and degeneration. It is many times accompanied by sensations in the hands and feet that range from numbness and tingling to severe pain. Neuropathy can be either acute (less than three months) or chronic (over three months in duration). Once neuropathy becomes chronic, rarely does it improve. Patrick Dougherty a Ph.D. at MD Anderson's Department of Pain Medicine has been studying chronic peripheral neuropathy as it relates to chemotherapy. He states that some chemotherapy agents such as Velcade (bortezomib) can cause as many as 60-70% of the patients treated to develop neuropathy.



Dr. Dougherty has been intrigued by the biologic mechanisms that cause pain and why some patients are more susceptible to painful nerve damage than others. It appears that a patient's likelihood of developing chronic neuropathic pain may be related to the density of nerve fibers in the outer layer (epidermal) of the skin. Chemotherapy can damage these nerve fibers and leave a patient with acute

pain. If these fibers don't regenerate the neuropathic pain becomes chronic.

In the past, baseline fiber density has been tested with a painful test called a punch biopsy but Dr. Dougherty is now looking at a new test that uses a special microscope to view high resolution images of a patient's skin. By looking at a patient's fingertips doctors may be able to help patients tailor their treatment to choose the best treatment and dose to achieve goals without increasing risk of neuropathy. By doing this, Dr. Dougherty feels that fewer patients will discontinue therapy prior to wiping out their cancer and experience fewer debilitating neuropathic side effects.

His research may also apply to diabetic patients that experience neuropathy. About 60-70 percent of people with diabetes experience some form of neuropathy. The longer a person has had diabetes, the greater the risk of neuropathy. Increased levels of blood glucose, increased triglycerides (blood fats), elevated blood pressure, and increased weight also seem to increase risk. In all likelihood neuropathy in diabetics is caused by a combination of factors.

Symptoms of diabetic neuropathy are similar to those mentioned in the discussion on chemo induced neuropathy, however, in diabetics other neuropathic changes may be seen. Patients can also see muscle wasting, diarrhea or constipation, problems with urination, erectile dysfunction or

vaginal dryness, dizziness or fainting, and generalized weakness.

Diagnosis is based on a physical exam by your physician. During the exam, he may check blood pressure, heart rate, muscle strength, reflexes, and sensitivity to position changes, temperature, and light touch. Based on his/her findings, he may also order a nerve conduction study or electromyograph.

The first step in treating diabetic neuropathy is to bring blood glucose levels to within normal range. Monitoring blood glucose levels, altering eating habits, physical activity, and diabetes medications or insulin are of paramount importance. Traditional treatments for pain relief include: antidepressant medications such as amitriptyline, paroxetine (Paxil), or citalopram (Celexa), anticonvulsants such as gabapentin (Neurontin), or pregabalin (Lyrica), and opioids such as oxycodone, or tramadol (Ultram). Drowsiness is a major problem with most of these medications. **Our compounding pharmacy can also make topical gels that are very effective with fewer side effects since they are applied at the site of pain and cause little if any drowsiness. These medications do require a prescription but we are available to work with you and your doctor to custom make a medication to fit your specific needs.**

Supplements and natural products can also be considered for both chemotherapy induced neuropathy and diabetic neuropathy. My two top choices are **alpha lipoic acid and Neuragen**. Alpha **lipoic acid** should be taken at a dose of 300mg three times daily on a regular basis for three months before determining effectiveness. It is a potent antioxidant that can also lower blood sugar. This can be a positive thing for diabetics but caution should also be taken to monitor blood sugars initially to make sure blood glucose does not decrease too much. **Neuragen** is a new product for us. **Neuragen** can be used with any type of neuropathic pain. It comes either as a spray or cream. Our experience has been that most patients receive relief within minutes after application. This product is a blend of homeopathic ingredients

coupled with a penetrating base of botanical extracts. Clinical trials have showed **Neuragen** to be over 80% effective in reducing nerve pain. One of the major benefits of both **alpha lipoic acid and Neuragen** are their lack of side effects, especially drowsiness.

As with most other diseases, prevention is the key. I always come back to the importance of diet, exercise, and reduction of inflammation. Concentrate on these areas and your risk of developing neuropathy are significantly decreased.

(network, The University of Texas, MD Anderson Cancer Center, Fall 2011; Diabetic Neuropathies: The Nerve Damage of Diabetics, National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse (NDIC), online)

What's the Risk of Secondary Cancers From Radiation Treatments?

A recent study conducted by the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and MD Anderson has found that a relatively small number of secondary cancers are caused by radiation therapy. The study, published in *Lancet Oncology*, looked at 647,672 patients and estimated that 3,266 patients (8%) developed a secondary cancer that might have been related to their radiation treatment.

Although many factors can affect results and possibly distort the findings, it is apparent that appropriate radiation therapy in cancer patients far outweighs the risks of treatment.

Did You Know?

- 40% of plants comprise key ingredients which can be used for prescription drugs
- 2/3 of all plants in the world have medicinal properties
- Asian/African countries-80% of the population depend on plants (traditional medicine) for their source of primary health care
- Botanicals are the most popular form of traditional medicine
- Approximately 120 compounds have been taken from plants and 80% of these are used in modern medicine

2291 West Fourth Street Mansfield, OH 44906

(419)756-2559 www.wellstore.com