

You Are Not Alone

We've all experienced pain—whether it's a leg cramp from running or achy arms from lifting a heavy box. But there is a different type of pain that affects the nerves in our bodies. And it can cause unbearable pain that never seems to go away.

More than fifteen million people in the U.S. and Europe have what is called neuropathic pain or nerve pain. This is a puzzling and frustrating condition that can make even the simplest act, such as walking or putting on socks, agonizing.

Many people don't know what it is they are feeling. And they don't know how to describe it to their doctor. Because of this, they are not getting the care necessary to help ease their suffering.

We are here to help. This brochure provides a brief explanation of nerve pain—how it happens, what it feels like, and steps you can take to begin your recovery. You also can find more information about nerve pain, pain support groups, and resources for finding a doctor by visiting us on the Web at www.ittakesnerve.org.

Penney Cowan

American Chronic Pain Association (ACPA)

The American Chronic Pain Association was founded in 1980 by Penney Cowan in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. After many years of living with chronic pain, Penney took part in the pain management program at the Cleveland Clinic and was eager to maintain the skills she had learned there when she returned to her daily life.

Today, several hundred ACPA support groups meet across the US and in Canada, Great Britain, and many other countries. The ACPA's unique materials are a primary resource for individuals seeking to improve the quality of their lives and for the professionals who help them.

Recently, the ACPA launched *It Takes Nerve*, a campaign to raise awareness about nerve pain and help educate people to recognize the symptoms of this common, yet often under-recognized and under-treated, problem.

To Learn More

About how you can begin to enjoy a better quality of life in spite of nerve pain, visit www.ittakesnerve.org.



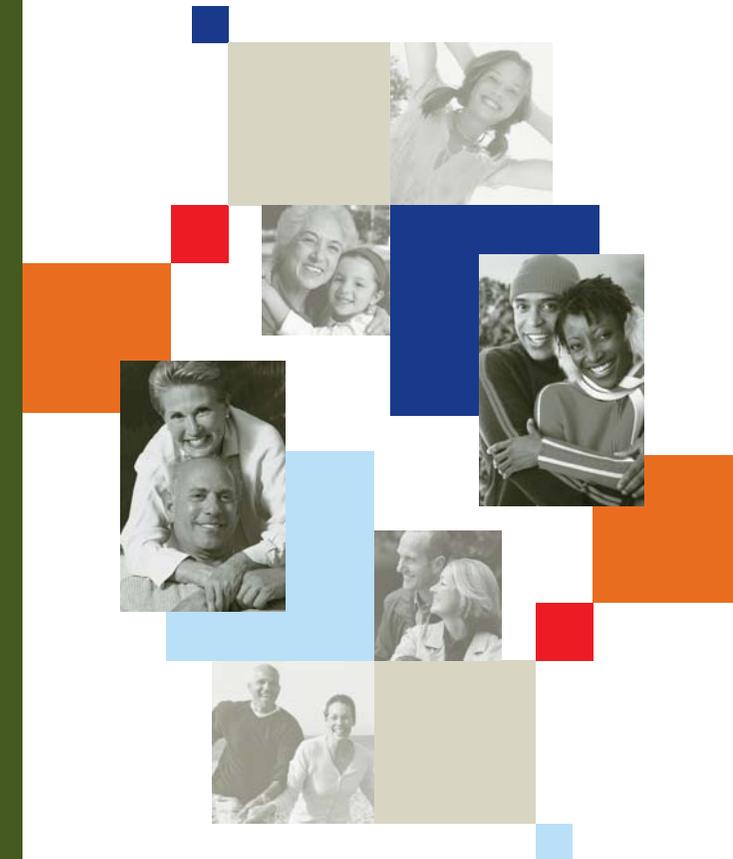
American Chronic Pain Association

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Understanding Nerve Pain

"It felt like I was walking on broken glass."



American Chronic Pain Association

How nerve pain happens...

There are millions of nerves linked to one another throughout your body. These nerves make up your central nervous system. Think of it as a series of electrical wires or telephone lines connecting your brain and body, allowing them to communicate.

For example, when you step on the beach in the summertime, nerves in your feet send a message to your brain that you are stepping on something hot. As a result, your feet may feel like they are burning. Or, if you accidentally touch a live electrical outlet, nerves in your hand will send a signal that you're being shocked.

"I felt like someone was driving a burning hot spike into my feet."

Nerve pain feels like...

Many people with nerve pain often don't describe this feeling as "painful." Instead, they may describe it as being pricked with pins and needles or shocked by electricity. Often, pain can be caused by something that is not painful, such as the light touch of bed sheets.

Other common symptoms include:

- Numbness
- Burning
- Tingling
- A stabbing sensation
- Pins and needles
- Electric-shock pain

Pain can interfere with your daily life...

When nerve pain is not properly managed, it can end up controlling the way you live. Simply walking to the market can be agonizing. Even wearing clothing, like socks, or the touch of a bed sheet can cause an unbearable burning pain.

Many pain sufferers cannot get a good night's sleep or go to work because of their pain. They don't think they will ever get relief and often begin feeling hopeless and depressed. They might stay at home more often and stop seeing their friends or family.



It Takes Nerve

Take control of your pain...

There are ways to take control and manage your nerve pain. But you need to get involved in your care and take on a share of the responsibility for your wellbeing. Half the battle is won when you take an active role and begin to help yourself.

You can do this by:

- Talking to your doctor about your pain and about how best to manage it.
- Asking about medicines that are developed specifically to treat nerve pain.
- Learning how to relax and set realistic goals.
- Exercising. Identify a moderate program you can do safely.
- Getting your family and friends involved.
- Contacting the ACPA at 1-800-533-3231. We can help you find a support group in your area or start a group with information and support from the national office.

"I can't do anything without pain. I can't sleep at night. No one in my family really knows what I'm going through."

But like wires that short circuit, nerves can become injured and stop working the way they should. If the nerve isn't working properly, it may begin sending the wrong signals to the brain. So, injured nerves might tell your brain that your foot is burning or your hand is being shocked by electricity even when you aren't stepping on something hot or touching an electrical socket.

Nerves can become injured or damaged in a number of ways, such as an injury to the spine or from a medical illnesses like diabetes, shingles, a stroke, HIV infection, or cancer and its treatments.

"I felt silly going to my doctor about numbness in my feet. I wish I had known earlier it was nerve pain."

How can you tell if it's nerve pain or muscle pain?	Nerve pain	Muscle pain
	Doesn't seem to be caused by an event or trauma	Caused by a physical injury, such as a fall
	Constant and/or recurring pain that doesn't seem to go away	Pain that stops once an injury heals
	Burning, stabbing, pins and needles; even wearing clothing is painful	Sore and achy muscles
	Feel depressed, helpless; normal pain medicine like aspirin does not stop the pain	Feel distressed but hopeful because more pain medicine relieves the pain