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## What is Neuropathic Pain?

### Neuropathic Pain

Neuropathic pain is defined as pain that arises as a direct consequence of a lesion or diseases affecting the somatosensory system.

- Peripheral neuropathic pain can be caused by nerve injury or disease. Important causes include lumbar radiculopathy (“sciatica”), postherpetic neuralgia (persistent pain after a shingles episode), diabetic neuropathy, HIV-related neuropathy, and chronic postsurgical pain.
- Central neuropathic pain can arise after a stroke or spinal cord injury, in multiple sclerosis, or in other neurological and metabolic conditions.
- Neuropathic pain is characterized by unpleasant symptoms, such as shooting or burning pain, numbness, altered sensation, and sensations that are very difficult to describe. However, many pains can have neuropathic characteristics, including pain arising from classically “non-neuropathic” conditions (e.g., osteoarthritis or cancer pain).
- A clinician can confirm neuropathic pain by finding evidence of a nerve lesion, such as reduced or increased sensitivity and altered sensation, or pain in response to light touch.
- Standard analgesics are relatively ineffective in neuropathic pain. Good evidence-based treatment guidelines specifically address the treatment of neuropathic pain. These guidelines recommend treatment with antiepileptic drugs (e.g., gabapentin or pregabalin), antidepressants (e.g., amitriptyline or duloxetine), and/or topical preparations, along with other drugs and nonpharmacological approaches.
- Despite the availability of many effective drugs and guidelines for the treatment of neuropathic pain, evidence from the United States and Europe suggests that they are not widely used, and many cases remain under- or untreated.
- There is also evidence that many of the effective drugs are not routinely available in many countries around the world.
- An improved awareness of neuropathic pain among patients and health care providers will result in improved management of patients with chronic neuropathic pain.

### References

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