

# Diabetic Peripheral Neuropathy (DPN)

## Screening for DPN: When should it happen?

### For type 1 diabetes:

- Because DPN is uncommon within the first 5 years after onset of type 1 diabetes, annual screening for DPN should begin after 5 years of diabetes diagnosis.
- For children with type 1 diabetes, screening should be done once the child is past puberty and has had diabetes for at least 5 years.

### For type 2 diabetes:

- For people with type 2 diabetes, screening for DPN should begin right away, at diagnosis of diabetes, and occur every year after that.

## What is it?

- DPN is a long-term complication of diabetes. Exposure to high blood glucose levels over an extended period of time causes damage to the peripheral nerves – the nerves that go to the arms, hands, legs, and feet.

## Symptoms

Although DPN can occur in many places in the body, the most common symptoms of DPN are abnormal sensations in the toes and feet, including:

- sharp, shooting pains
- burning
- tingling
- a feeling of being pricked with pins
- throbbing
- numbness (not able to properly feel pain, heat, or cold)

DPN increases the risk for foot ulcers and amputation. Due to nerve damage in their feet and toes, people with diabetes who have DPN often do not notice minor cuts, sores, or blisters in these areas. If left untreated, these small wounds can easily become infected, lead to gangrene, and may eventually require amputation of the affected area.

## What are the risk factors?

- high blood glucose levels
- elevated triglycerides
- excess body weight
- smoking
- high blood pressure

## Diagnosing DPN in the feet

Your doctor or foot care specialist can test for DPN by lightly pressing a thin nylon rod (10-gram monofilament) to different areas of your foot (in particular, your big toe) or by using the 128-Hz tuning fork on the back of the big toe to determine if you can feel it. These are easy and pain-free tests.



### How can I prevent complications of DPN?

Although there is no cure, there are many ways you can effectively manage DPN:

#### Proper foot care

- examine your feet and legs daily
- care for you nails regularly
- apply lotion if your feet are dry (but not between the toes)
- wear properly fitting footwear
- test your bath water before you step in to make sure it's not too hot
- do not soak your feet

#### Excellent blood glucose control

- managing your blood glucose levels effectively can help to prevent further nerve damage

#### Medications

- some medications that act on the nerves, can be helpful
- ask your doctor what would be best for you



*Across the country, the Canadian Diabetes Association is leading the fight against diabetes by helping people with diabetes live healthy lives while we work to find a cure. Our community-based network of supporters help us provide education and services to people living with diabetes, advocate for our cause, break ground towards a cure and translate research into practical applications.*

\*This document reflects the 2013 Canadian Diabetes Association Clinical Practice Guidelines. ©2013 Copyright

 **Canadian  
Diabetes**  
Association

**Related articles:** *Foot Care: A step toward good health, Diabetes, Healthy Feet and You*

**diabetes.ca | 1-800 BANTING**