

Raising Awareness About Neuropathic Pain

Ed. Note: The following is a press release from the American Chronic Pain Association.

09/21/2004 -- Imagine living every day with pain that causes tingling and "pins and needles" in your back, feet, or wrists. Sometimes this pain even causes an electric shock-like sensation. It also is unpredictable, leading to anxiety about when it will strike next. This different type of pain is called neuropathic pain -- otherwise known as nerve pain -- and it affects 15 million Americans and Europeans.

According to a recent survey sponsored by the American Chronic Pain Association (ACPA), nerve pain -- despite being chronic and sometimes disabling -- is not well understood. Nearly 34 percent of Americans have or know someone who has experienced pain that causes tingling, "pins and needles," burning, or an electric shock-like sensation, yet only six percent of people recognize these symptoms as nerve pain.

"The symptoms of nerve pain are hard to describe because the feelings are very different from other types of pain," said Penney Cowan, founder and executive director of the American Chronic Pain Association. "Because the symptoms of nerve pain are variable, finding the right language to describe them is often challenging. Nonetheless, nerve pain can significantly interfere with a person's life and even the simplest acts, like putting on socks or buttoning a shirt, can be agonizing."

Nerve pain is a type of chronic pain (a condition in which painful symptoms seem never to go away or occur off and on periodically) that affects the nerves in the body. Nerve pain occurs when there is a dysfunction of the central nervous system or nerves become injured. The cause and symptoms of nerve pain are very different from pain associated with an injury or that of achy and sore muscles. Common nerve pain symptoms include: tingling, "pins and needles," numbness, burning, stabbing, shooting, and electric shock-like feelings. These symptoms are associated with conditions such as diabetes, shingles, carpal tunnel syndrome, and cancer and its treatments.

Awareness of nerve pain is low even among those diagnosed with health conditions linked to this disorder, such as diabetes, shingles, and carpal tunnel syndrome. While one in four of those surveyed have been diagnosed with one of these conditions, only 12 percent were aware of symptoms like tingling, "pins and needles," numbness, burning, stabbing, shooting, and electric shock-like feelings as nerve pain.

"These survey findings underscore the need to educate the public about nerve pain and the importance of understanding that they can do something about this disorder," said Cowan.

"Neuropathic pain can be frustrating for people because the person is experiencing pain in a body part that appears perfectly normal," said Edward Covington, MD, Director of the Chronic Pain Rehabilitation Program, Cleveland Clinic Foundation. "People need to recognize all the symptoms of pain, take them seriously, and speak to their physician for proper diagnosis and treatment."

"It Takes Nerve" Public Education Campaign

The American Chronic Pain Association (ACPA) is launching the "It Takes Nerve" 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.

"The 'It Takes Nerve' initiative is designed to help people living with nerve pain learn that this is a disorder that they can do something about," said Cowan. "If you feel a tingling, stabbing, or shock-like sensation, talk to your doctor. As with all chronic pain disorders, you don't have to just accept the pain. There are ways to manage pain and not let it control your life."

More About the Survey

The survey included a random sampling of 939 U.S. adults not employed in the medical field. The purpose of the survey was to determine the level of knowledge among Americans about chronic pain disorders, specifically nerve pain. The survey was conducted from August 27 through 29, 2004. The margin of sampling error is +/- 3 percentage points. Roper Worldwide conducted the survey. Funding for the study was provided by an educational grant from Pfizer.

About the American Chronic Pain Association

Since 1980, the American Chronic Pain Association (ACPA) has been the place to go for the 86 million people--about 30 percent of Americans--who suffer from this debilitating condition. In the 24 years since the organization was founded with a single support group in a Pittsburgh suburb, it has grown into an international organization with active groups in all 50 states, Canada, Australia, Mexico, England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Brazil, and Russia. Its grassroots network of self-help groups and other resources offer support and education to those with chronic pain and their families and friends.

While chronic pain is the organization's focus, ACPA and its programs also touch those suffering from long-term acute pain. In 2005, the ACPA will mark its 25th year as an incorporated tax-exempt organization.

To learn more nerve pain and about how you can begin to enjoy a better quality of life in spite of nerve pain, people are invited to visit <http://www.ittakesnerve.org/> or call 1.800.533.3231.

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