



Practice Guideline Update:

Oral and Topical Treatment of Painful Diabetic Neuropathy

Summary for Patients and Their Families

Experts from the American Academy of Neurology, or AAN, carefully reviewed the available evidence about oral and topical (applied to your skin) treatment of painful diabetic neuropathy. The following summary highlights what their findings mean for you.

What is a painful diabetic neuropathy?

Diabetic neuropathy is a type of nerve damage that can occur if you have diabetes. It most commonly involves the nerves in your legs and feet and can cause pain and numbness. Doctors may not always discuss painful neuropathy with patients who have diabetes. Therefore, the pain may go untreated. Painful diabetic neuropathy can affect your quality of life, but effective treatments are available.



What is the key message for me?

- Painful diabetic neuropathy is very common. If you have diabetes, you should discuss nerve pain with your doctor.
- Painful diabetic neuropathy can affect your quality of life when it is not treated.
- There are many effective treatments to reduce nerve pain. These include oral and topical drugs as well as other treatments.
- After starting treatment, from time to time your doctor should check you for pain relief and side effects.
- Opioids should not be among the drugs you and your doctor consider for painful diabetic neuropathy because of the high risk of side effects.

Oral and Topical Treatment of Painful Diabetic Neuropathy —continued

What does the research say?

A review of clinical trials suggested that oral drugs from the following four classes, in no particular order, reduce pain from diabetic neuropathy:

- Serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs) such as duloxetine, venlafaxine, and desvenlafaxine
- Tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs) such as amitriptyline, nortriptyline, and imipramine
- Gabapentinoids such as gabapentin and pregabalin
- Sodium channel blockers such as carbamazepine, oxcarbazepine, lamotrigine, valproic acid, and lacosamide

What should I know about the recommendations?

- If you have diabetes, the guideline recommends that your doctor check to see if you have painful diabetic neuropathy. If you do, your doctor should also check you for mood or sleep problems since the treatment for these conditions may overlap.

- When discussing treatment options with you for your painful diabetic neuropathy, your doctor should consider your priorities regarding drug cost and side effects, as well as other medical problems you may have.
- Topical drugs and nondrug interventions are also available to reduce pain.
- If a drug from one medication class does not work for you, your doctor should offer a drug from one of the other three medication classes that reduce nerve pain.
- Your doctor should not offer you opioids to treat your painful diabetic neuropathy.

What should I ask my doctor?

- What is my risk of painful diabetic neuropathy?
- Is there anything I can do to prevent painful diabetic neuropathy?
- How will I know if I am developing painful diabetic neuropathy?
- What are my options for treating painful diabetic neuropathy?

This practice advisory update was endorsed by the American Association of Neuromuscular and Electrodiagnostic Medicine.

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To learn more about brain health, go to [BrainandLife.org](https://www.brainandlife.org).

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