



# wellness

Newsday's guide to healthy living

[life at...]

## 50 something

### DIABETIC NEUROPATHY — ALLEVIATING THE PAIN

By Michael Rose, M.D., FACS

Neuropathy is a nerve disorder commonly caused by diabetes, but can also be caused by chemotherapy, alcoholism, medications and other factors. At some point it will affect more than half of the 18 million diabetics in



the U.S. Regardless of the cause, it has been found that in neuropathy the nerves are more swollen and stiff than normal nerves. The swelling causes the nerves to become "pinched" as they pass through tight areas in the arms and legs. This results in weakness, numbness and pain in the hands and feet. As a result of the numbness, the patient is left unaware of blisters, cuts and abrasions on the skin, particularly on the feet. Wounds may worsen as they remain uncared for, become

infected and can lead to amputation. For diabetics, this results in more than 100,000 amputations annually.

Traditionally, it was believed that since neuropathy is caused by a systemic disease, that something precise and targeted like surgery would not help. However, despite being a systemic disease, the symptoms are caused by precise, focused areas of nerve compression. A good analogy would be someone who gained 50 pounds overnight. Yes, their entire body gained the weight in a "systemic" or "general" way, but that person would be most interested in a very targeted unbuckling of their belt, and unbuttoning of their pants because that would be the area that was the causing them the most discomfort. Similarly, while the whole nerve is swollen, and damaged in neuropathy, it is only the parts of the nerves that are stuck in the tight areas (the tunnels) that need to be released to provide relief.

Based upon these findings, an innovative procedure — nerve decompression surgery — is now used to alleviate the symptoms of neuropathy. This minimally invasive, outpatient procedure involves three small incisions and lasts approximately 90 minutes.

Most patients are back to basic activities in two to three weeks. ●

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### Qualifying for the Surgery

How are patients "properly" selected for nerve decompression surgery? First, they must have neuropathy, and not another cause for the pain. Second, they must have good enough circulation to allow for surgery. Third, they need to be healthy enough to undergo surgery. Finally, patients must be examined for a Tinel sign, which indicates that the nerve will respond to surgery.

The success of this procedure and its ability to improve a patient's quality of life are remarkable, given the conventional belief that there isn't an existing treatment for neuropathy. Ideally patients will undergo surgery before developing complications such as pain, ulcerations and amputations.

To control diabetes and the onset of neuropathy, test your blood glucose levels ensuring that they are as close to the normal range as possible. This protects nerves throughout your body. Participate in physical activities and choose healthy foods.

—Rose



# 75%

of properly selected patients undergoing nerve decompression surgery benefit from increased sensation and decrease in pain.