

Can Exercise Reverse Neuropathy?

While painful symptoms of peripheral neuropathy might make it seem like exercise is not a good idea, this couldn't be further from the truth.

Naturally when you are suffering with the irritating (if not agonizing) symptoms that come with some of the more common types of neuropathy, you may wonder: Can [exercise](#) reverse neuropathy? Can exercise be harmful and cause more nerve damage?

Science shows us exercise is one of the best methods, and also one of the easiest and most universal methods for fighting peripheral neuropathy.

Let's take a closer look at how.

Exercise Improves Nerve Health with Better Blood Circulation

Your blood functions as the delivery system for important compounds, such as growth factors and nutrients, that all work together to ensure proper nerve function. In fact, the farther your nerve endings get away from the central parts of your body, the more important the blood's role becomes in keeping them healthy.

As a result, one of the main reasons that [peripheral neuropathy](#) often starts in the feet is due to the difficulty the body has with pumping adequate blood supply carrying the essential compounds needed for nerve tissue survival to this farthest distance from the heart.

This is why conditions that affect the circulatory system are

also conditions that can cause nerve damage.

Just some of these conditions include:

- Diabetes
- Atherosclerosis
- Peripheral artery disease
- Chronic venous insufficiency

One of the most troublesome things about peripheral neuropathy is that it very often leads to what can be known as “secondary issues.” This basically refers to the fact that when your nervous system is damaged, the effects don’t really stop there.

Exercise Improves Muscle Strength

One example of secondary issues related to nerve damage is muscle atrophy. This means the muscles breakdown and become smaller. This happens when [peripheral neuropathy is specifically impacting the motor neurons](#). As your muscles lose their ability to properly contract, they can start to waste away.

Regular exercise helps to avoid muscle wasting. Not only does it ensure that your muscles are strengthened with regular use, but they are also better preserved with improved nourishment (thanks to increased blood flow).

Exercise Reduces Fall Risk

Another secondary problem that can come from peripheral neuropathy involves an [increased risk for trips and falls](#). As muscles weaken, coordination and balance may become weakened as well, increasing risk for injury. Injuries are especially important to avoid when blood vessels and nerves are compromised due to the decreased ability to heal that results

as well.

Regular exercise, though, helps to keep muscles strong, improving balance and coordination. This equates to reduced risk for falls and injuries that are of particular concern when nerve damage is present and blood circulation is compromised.

Exercise Reduces Pain



Another great benefit that comes from regular exercise involves the release of endorphins. These are, in effect, your happy hormones.

A [healthy dose of endorphins](#) goes a long way when you're dealing with the near-constant symptoms of peripheral neuropathy.

Endorphins are among the brain chemicals known as neurotransmitters, which function to transmit electrical signals within the nervous system. Endorphins interact with

the opiate receptors in the brain to reduce our perception of pain and act similarly to drugs such as morphine and codeine ([1](#)).

Exercise Reduces Chronic Inflammation

The common factor to nearly all of our most prevalent and preventable modern diseases (including most cases of neuropathy) is [chronic inflammation](#): The damaging systemic type resulting from an over-activated immune system.

A 2019 Study by Harvard scientists showed exercise improved cardiovascular health by reducing chronic inflammation ([2](#)). And you already know the correlation of cardiovascular health to nerve health.

Furthermore, nerve pain is linked to excessive inflammation in both the peripheral and central nervous system. Not only the initiation of pain but also ongoing persistent pain can be blamed on chronic inflammation ([3](#)).

Because chronic inflammation is harmful to nerve health and is known to cause pain, lifestyle factors like exercise to reduce chronic inflammation is considered a viable remedy for the reversal of nerve damage and its symptoms.

Let's return to the question: Can exercise reverse neuropathy?

If lack of blood supply and chronic inflammation can cause nerve damage, then does improved blood supply and reduced chronic inflammation through exercise reverse neuropathy?

Yes and no.

Yes, exercise will:

- improve the availability of essential compounds needed for nerves to regenerate themselves
- improve muscle strength to prevent atrophy and weakness
- improve risk of injury
- improve pain
- improve chronic inflammation, which is damaging to nerve and contributes to pain

However...

Key Point

Exercise alone will not regenerate nerves. The regeneration of nerves requires many factors combined at once. Exercise, yes, but also an anti-inflammatory diet, elimination of nutritional deficiencies, detoxification, balanced blood sugar, and management of stress.

Tips for Your Exercise Plan



When dealing with the symptoms of damage to your nervous system, motivation for exercising may be low. In fact, many

individuals with peripheral neuropathy inadvertently worsen their condition through inactivity.

While it might seem like staying still is the best way to mitigate the pain caused by peripheral nerve damage, the opposite is true.

But, it is also important to recognize that exercise must be undertaken cautiously when peripheral neuropathy is in play. You don't want to injure yourself further, due to obstacles like impaired coordination.

1. Exercise with Caution

Good rules of thumb? Don't push yourself harder than feels right. According to Mayo Clinic, if pain caused by exercise persists for longer than two hours, it may be too strenuous. Start slow and work up gradually over time.

In some cases, neuropathy specifically targets the [autonomic nervous system](#). This means that your body's involuntary functions are impaired. If you have damage to your autonomic nervous system, which may happen in the case of systemic causes of peripheral neuropathy, you must be extra vigilant as you work out.

Monitoring things like your blood pressure, heart rate, and breathing becomes extra important, as you must be sure to compensate for your body's elevated activity levels when it can no longer do this naturally.

2. Choose Low-Impact Exercise to Avoid Injuries

Peripheral neuropathy in the lower limbs tends to weaken muscle control. It can also lead to a loss of feeling, in many cases. Both of these conditions can make physical activity more risky and require extra caution. Not only are you at an

[increased risk of falls](#), but you can potentially injure yourself in other ways, too.

Joint misalignment, stress fractures, and other problems become greater risks when your nerves are impaired in the lower extremities, so it's smart to avoid higher-impact workouts like running and swap them out with lower-impact activities like rowing or swimming.

3. Integrate Exercise Into Your Day



Managing to work exercise into your daily routine is going to have a positive impact on your nerves. Especially if they've been fending off the damage done by peripheral neuropathy.

Key Point

As a general rule of thumb, you want to elevate your heart rate for at least 20 minutes per day, five days a week.

Take a look around the house and find some projects that need

accomplishing, focusing on tasks that will lend themselves to some vigorous movement.

Do those chores get your breathing up for at least 20 minutes or more? Well then, you did your exercise for the day.

Maybe a 20-minute stroll around the neighborhood is all you can handle. Even parking farther away from the office than you normally would and giving yourself a longer walk can be a good start to integrating physical exertion into your day.

Bottom Line

Can exercise reverse neuropathy? Getting exercise every day is one of the most effective steps you can take toward reversing peripheral neuropathy.

Not only will you be giving yourself a pretty significant mood boost – thanks to regular exposure to “happy hormone” endorphins – but you’ll be encouraging the regeneration of your damaged nervous system with an improved supply of oxygen and nutrients, and lowering chronic inflammation, as well.

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