



Prescription Medications for Nerve Pain - Review

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Getting control of your nerve pain can be tough. The good news is that doctors have a lot of effective ways to treat it. These include medicines, like prescription pain relievers or anticonvulsants and antidepressants, as well as electrical stimulation and other techniques. So if you have nerve pain, take hope. Here's a rundown of the prescription treatments that your doctor might recommend.

Anticonvulsants. The name might sound alarming, but some of these drugs can help people with nerve pain. In fact, they're often considered a first choice. These drugs were originally developed for people with epilepsy to control seizures. It turned out that their effects on the nervous system could also help dull pain. Side effects may include drowsiness, dizziness, and nausea. (*Editor: pregabalin/brand name Lyrica and gabapentin*)

Antidepressants. Along with anticonvulsants, certain types of antidepressants can be the first choice for treating neuropathic pain. Nerve pain specialists often recommend two major types.

Tricyclic antidepressants have been used for decades. While they're not used as often today to treat depression, they can play an important role in controlling nerve pain symptoms. Many studies have shown that they can help. These drugs can cause side effects, like dizziness, constipation, blurred vision, and upset stomach. They might not be safe for people with certain conditions, like heart problems. (*Editor: most common amitriptyline and nortriptyline*)

SNRIs (serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors) are a newer type of antidepressant that seem to help with nerve pain. In general, these drugs have fewer side effects than tricyclic antidepressants. They might be safer for some, especially older people with heart problems. However, they might not be as effective as tricyclics in tackling nerve pain. (*Editor: most common duloxetine/brand name Cymbalta*)

Using antidepressants for nerve pain can have an added benefit, considering that chronic pain often coincides with depression. Chronic pain can make a person depressed, and depression can often make the experience of chronic pain seem worse. So these drugs might help improve your mood, as well as ease your discomfort. Of course, some people don't like the idea of taking antidepressants for their nerve pain because they worry taking antidepressants implies that the pain is just "in their heads." But that's not the case at all. It just happens that these drugs work with both conditions.

Painkillers. For severe nerve pain, powerful opioid painkillers can help. Studies have found that for many types of nerve pain, they are as effective as anticonvulsants or antidepressants. Unlike other treatments for nerve pain, they also work very quickly. However, because of their side effects, many doctors only turn to these drugs when other treatments haven't worked. Opioid painkillers can cause constipation, stomach upset, and sedation. They also pose some risk of addiction and abuse, so it's important to use them exactly as your doctor recommends. Other painkillers, like prescription doses of NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), might be helpful. But on the whole, those drugs don't seem to work well with nerve pain.

Combination treatments. Your doctor might recommend that you use one or two of these treatments together, an approach called combination therapy. Many studies have shown that combining certain drugs, often an anticonvulsant and an antidepressant, has a better effect on nerve pain than either medication alone.

Controlling Nerve Pain

If you're suffering with nerve pain and treatment isn't helping enough, don't give up hope. Instead, go back to your doctor and come up with a new approach. Or get a referral to an expert, like a pain specialist or a neurologist. There are a lot of different ways to tackle nerve pain. If one approach doesn't work, others might. By working with an expert, and being persistent, you can find something that will help.