Neuropathic Pain & Cold Weather

» Holiday Headache Triggers
» Physical Activity Can Reduce Back Pain
Neuropathy (also referred to as peripheral neuropathy, polyneuropathy, or nerve pain) is a condition in which the feet and occasionally the hands experience progressive numbness and pain. It is caused by damage to nerves in the peripheral nervous system, which includes all of the nerves outside of the brain and spinal cord. Numbness is the most common symptom reported with neuropathy. Patients often experience stabbing, prickling, burning, or aching pain, and in some cases, there is loss of balance and difficulty walking.

As with all pain, neuropathy can worsen as temperatures drop. When the body is exposed to colder temperatures, the blood circulation slows in the hands and feet to better preserve a warm temperature in its core. As blood flow is reduced, nerve pain can greatly intensify. It is clear that nerve pain worsens in the cold weather, especially when precautions are not taken.

Neuropathy is worse in the winter for several reasons. First, the drop in barometric pressure causes pressure on nerves that control pain signals to the brain. The pressure causes these nerve signals to slow down, increasing the perception of pain. Second, the soft tissues become firmer in colder temperatures. When muscles tighten, they tend to spasm resulting in pain. Furthermore, blood flow becomes restricted in the distal extremities. That is why the feet and hands are affected initially and most intensely.

Nerve pain can be managed effectively during the cold weather. At TriState Pain Institute, we encourage all of our patients to stay warm, informed, and hopefully pain free this winter season. For more information about treating nerve pain, talk with a TriState Pain Institute specialist today.

- **Wear a hat and scarf.** These winter essentials will prevent body heat from escaping the body.
- **Wear gloves and socks.** To help neuropathic and arthritic pain and keep your body warm, layer your socks and keep your hands covered.
- **Avoid caffeine.** Too much caffeine can cause the blood vessels to temporarily narrow, restricting blood flow.
- **Don’t smoke.** Blood circulation to the arms and legs slows down when you smoke.
- **Take a break.** Don’t stay outside for too long. If you can, take short breaks indoors to return warmth to your body.
- **Exercise.** Light cardio can improve blood flow and promote good circulation.
‘Tis the season to be jolly…right”? Yet for many of us, the holiday season means more headaches, added stress, and reasons to feel not so festive. Triggers such as the overwhelming smell of cinnamon and bright colorful lights can trigger headaches, migraines, stress, pain, and suffering. However, by following a few simple tips, your holiday season can get a whole lot merrier.

The TriState Pain Institute works to relieve migraine and headache pain year round. We understand that certain things can produce or worsen symptoms, and we’re here to help. Combat your pain head on and don’t let common holiday headaches turn you into a Grinch this winter!

**Alcohol Moderation.** No one wants a hangover during the holidays. The next couple of months may be filled with chores and errands that will seem impossible following the consumption of too much alcohol. Drinking in moderation or choosing non-alcoholic drinks instead allows celebration without consequences. Stay hydrated and drink slowly.

**Reduce Stress.** Your to-do list can seem endless this time of year. To reduce stress, make daily lists. By staying organized you can reduce headaches and migraines. Be sure you’re getting adequate sleep each night and to not combat your fatigue with caffeine: it just may add to the stress!

**Avoid Seasonal Scents.** Department stores will fill your nostrils with pine and cinnamon scents which can actually bring on headaches. Steer clear of perfume counters and potent holiday aromas.

**Substitute Holiday Foods.** Avoid red wine, beer, processed meats, chocolate and MSG. Instead, eat more greens, olive oil, pumpkin seeds, and vegetable soups.

**Choose Holiday Lighting.** People are more prone to migraines and headaches when confronted with bright (and flashing) holiday lights. This winter, choose low lighting and try not to stare at the Christmas tree too long. Get a good pair of sunglasses for those sunny snowy days or just the bright winter sun.

Commit to having a great winter season! Take these small steps to improve your mood and help reduce your headaches and migraines. Holidays are an important time for family and friends. Don’t let your headaches ruin your holiday cheer this winter.
According to the American Obesity Association, nearly a third of Americans who are classified as obese also complain of diffuse and even debilitating musculoskeletal pain and back pain. It is common knowledge to most that spine conditions and lower back pain can be greatly aggravated by obesity. Other conditions such as sciatica, fibromyalgia, and pinched nerves can develop as a result of excess weight and little physical activity.

Exercise should always be integrated into any pain management program. For those in discomfort, even small movements or the lightest workouts can help reduce pain and improve the quality of life. At the TriState Pain Institute, we encourage our patients to stay physically active supplemented with a healthy diet throughout their treatment process.

At the North American Spine Society Meeting in New Orleans last October, the relationship of physical activity in reducing back pain for all patients, especially those with a few extra pounds, was examined. Back pain associated with obesity was so important, that a major study addressing this was awarded the Outstanding Paper Award for Medical and Interventional Science by The Spine Journal. In this investigation, researchers analyzed 6,800 individuals to determine the relationship between activity, weight, and back pain. Each was monitored with various activities for approximately a week. Body mass index or BMI (which takes into account one’s height, weight, and proportions) was used to more accurately compare on patient to another.

It was discovered that by increasing activity for only seven minutes reduces the risk of back pain by up to 17 percent! In addition, by increasing moderate activity up to 20 minutes each day, the risk of lower back pain would decrease by 32 percent.

The study concluded a four-fold overall increase of back pain existed, between obese patients compared to those with average weight. So if you exercise, you not only will lose weight, but also improve your overall health while feeling better.

The TriState Pain Institute uses a number of treatment options to relieve pain and improve quality of life. Maybe all that is needed is a little exercise and weight loss to ease or eliminate back pain. If you or someone you know suffers from lower back soreness and is overweight, contact a TriState Pain Institute today. We are not just pain management...we are your partner in improving your overall health and adding value to your life.