

PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY VETERAN PANEL

- Educate • Advocate • Empower

INTRODUCTION / WHY THIS TOPIC MATTERS TO ME

- First, I want to say thank you to every veteran joining this conversation.
- This topic matters to me because I am a veteran myself.
- I served seven years in the Army National Guard as a Medical Platoon Leader and Medical Executive Officer.
- My background in biomedical science, DHA studies, and chronic pain work shapes my advocacy.



MY GOAL TODAY

- Help veterans:
 - Understand peripheral neuropathy
 - Recognize symptoms earlier
 - Learn about VA resources
 - Understand treatment pathways
 - Feel supported and empowered

UNDERSTANDING PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY

- Peripheral neuropathy is not simply foot pain and does not only affect older adults.
- It occurs when nerves outside the brain and spinal cord become damaged or do not function properly.



COMMON SYMPTOMS

- • Burning sensations
- • Tingling or pins and needles
- • Numbness
- • Electric shock-like pain
- • Sensitivity to touch
- • Muscle weakness
- • Balance problems
- • Chronic pain

WHY VETERANS MAY MISS SYMPTOMS

- Many veterans normalize symptoms for years.
- They may think:
 - “I’m just getting older.”
 - “It’s from military wear-and-tear.”
 - “That’s just part of serving.”
- Symptoms are information.

WHY YOUNGER VETERANS SHOULD PAY ATTENTION

- Neuropathy does not only affect elderly patients or people with diabetes.
- Military service creates unique physical and environmental challenges.



MILITARY FACTORS

- • Repetitive impact
- • Heavy equipment and rucking
- • Airborne operations
- • Physical injuries
- • Spine-related conditions
- • Extreme environments
- • Occupational exposures

TOXIC EXPOSURE AWARENESS

- Veterans may have questions about long-term effects of exposures.
- Areas of research include:
 - Burn pits
 - Agent Orange
 - PFAS
 - Fuels
 - Solvents
 - Heavy metals

PACT ACT EDUCATION

- The PACT Act expanded recognition surrounding toxic exposures.
- Veterans should:
 - Enroll in VA healthcare
 - Document symptoms
 - Attend evaluations
 - Advocate for themselves

NAVIGATING VA RESOURCES

- Many veterans believe:
- “I probably don’t qualify.”
- “Someone else needs it more.”
- These benefits exist because veterans earned them.

MENTAL HEALTH AND IDENTITY LOSS

- Chronic pain impacts:
 - Sleep
 - Energy
 - Mood
 - Relationships
 - Independence
 - Identity

WHOLE PERSON CARE

- Invisible symptoms can still have a major impact.
- Veterans benefit from multidisciplinary support addressing physical and emotional health.

NON-OPIOID TREATMENT OPTIONS

- Veterans deserve options beyond medications:
- • Physical therapy
- • Movement
- • Nutrition
- • Sleep support
- • Behavioral health
- • Neurology
- • Pain management

CLOSING MESSAGE

- Do not ignore symptoms.
- Do not assume pain is just aging.
- Do not assume there are no options.
- Your service mattered. Your health matters.