

# A Better Way to Treat Neuropathy



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# A Better Way to Treat Neuropathy

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**“Your Next Step for Healthy Feet”**

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## Why I Wrote This Book

As a podiatrist, I specialize in the care and treatment of the foot and ankle. In my first publication "*Why Do My Feet Hurt and What Can I Do About It?*" I covered common foot issues in children and adults. However, in the last decade, I've seen firsthand the incidence of lower extremity nerve pain (Neuropathy) increasing as our general population continues to age. Many patients say they have been told that nothing can be done about their pain. So now, in this second publication, I want to address the burning, numbness, and tingling nerve pain in your feet that is so debilitating. **Don't give up hope! You CAN find relief and we can help!**

**As many as 28-32 million Americans suffer from lower extremity nerve pain.**

Lower extremity nerve pain, or weakness associated with nerve dysfunction, is experienced by people of all ages and demographic backgrounds. It most often occurs in middle age or later. It can also be the result of injury that happened earlier in life. Many times it is related to an underlying metabolic disease such as diabetes, thyroid conditions or others. There are a number of causes of lower leg and foot nerve pain, and I will cover them in greater detail later in this book. Often, these common problems go undiagnosed or misdiagnosed because symptoms can be so varied and because the onset of symptoms is sometimes very slow.

People that come in to see me often do so after the symptoms have become so severe that treatment options are limited. The difficulty in treating this condition is that it often goes undiagnosed, yet early treatment is often the key to successfully eliminating the problem.

I wrote this book to help you understand the symptoms and causes of lower extremity nerve pain and some of the treatments available to you. I'm very excited about the many treatment options for nerve pain and I want you to know that we have the very latest technologies available in our offices. Nutritional support, prescription medications, electrical signal therapy, laser therapy and surgery are some of the tools we use. **What sets us apart is a multi-pronged approach in treating nerve pain that helps heal the nerve and reverse the neuropathy.** After reading this book, I hope you consider

Next Step Foot and Ankle Clinic as *your next step to healthy feet*. My staff and I will do everything we can to treat your condition, eliminate your pain, and make you feel at home.

Dedicated to your health,

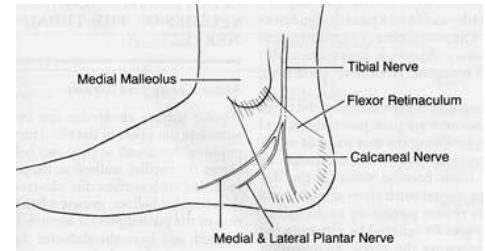


Darren J. Silvester, DPM, FACFAS, FAENS

## Common Nerve Conditions of the Foot and Ankle

### **Nerve entrapment: AKA Tarsal Tunnel Syndrome**

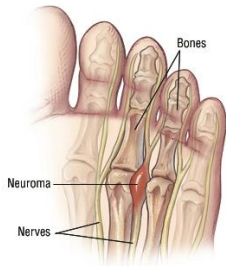
At the inside of your ankle, a nerve divides into branches, and crosses from the leg into the foot through a series of tunnels. This main nerve is called the Tibial Nerve, and it branches out to the medial and lateral plantar, and the calcaneal nerves. Sometimes, when the ankle moves, the nerve gets pressed. When the nerve gets pressed, **blood flow to the nerve decreases, and the nerve sends a message of numbness and tingling, or buzzing of the foot/toes.** This is very common in patients with diabetes because elevated blood sugar can make the nerve swell. If the nerve gets too big, it



gets pinched going through its tunnel causing symptoms to be felt on the bottom of the foot. This condition is frequently diagnosed as Peripheral Neuropathy and the patient is told to “live with it” or is given prescription medication that makes the nerve feel better while it dies. Don’t settle- there is a better way to treat and even reverse this type of Peripheral Neuropathy.

### **Interdigital Neuroma**

Compression of the sensory nerve between the metatarsals is a very common condition of the foot. The symptoms most people



complain about are burning, numbness, cramping, and ball of foot pain. You may have heard the phrase “Morton’s neuroma”. This describes a neuroma between the third and fourth toes. These interdigital nerve problems can occur between any of the toes. With an interdigital neuroma, the burning, numbness, and cramping are often felt on the top of the foot. These symptoms often occur while wearing a closed toe shoe, a high heeled shoe, and during endurance exercise like running or cycling. This condition occurs because of compression on the nerve. The nerve is caught between two bones on either side, a ligament on the top, and the floor on the bottom. A thorough history and physical examination will determine the

presence of this condition, and only after a definitive diagnosis is made will a treatment regime be discussed. Treatments include patient education, shoe modification, over the counter orthotics, custom orthotics, oral anti-inflammatories, water soluble steroid injections, and surgical decompression of the nerve. On rare occasions removal of the nerve is necessary to alleviate pain.

### **Entrapment of the Deep Fibular (Peroneal) Nerve**



The common site of Deep Fibular Nerve entrapment is the top of the foot near the peak in the arch of the foot.

This site is often painful for those who wear shoes that tightly wrap these areas. Common complaints are tingling, numbness, and burning into the first and second toes, relieved by removal of the shoe and rubbing the top of the foot. Nerve entrapments may be caused by trauma to the foot or repetitive compression of the

nerve from wearing too tight shoes or running in shoes that are not properly fit.

### **Compression of the Common Fibular Nerve (Pinched Nerve)**

This condition can cause pain on the outside of the leg that runs to the top of the foot. The pain is characterized by burning, shooting pain or sensitivity to the top of the foot. Sometimes, it can be so severe as to cause “motor neuropathy”, which affects your muscles, and a Drop Foot develops. This nerve compression site is at the outside of the leg just below the knee. Pushing on the nerve can recreate symptoms of this condition or cause pain to radiate down or up the leg.



## What is Peripheral Neuropathy?

Many cases of lower extremity nerve pain are classified as Peripheral Neuropathy. This is a disorder of the nerves that connect the spinal cord to the muscles, skin, and organs. The peripheral nerves control your sense of touch, the way you feel pain and temperature, and your muscle function. Patients with Peripheral Neuropathy may have the same symptoms in their fingers and hands as well. When it affects your sensation it is called “**sensory neuropathy**”. When it affects your muscles it is called “**motor neuropathy**.”

## What Are the Symptoms of Peripheral Neuropathy?

Symptoms of peripheral neuropathy can develop slowly over time. Symptoms can also vary widely from patient to patient, which can lead to delayed diagnosis or misdiagnosis. Some people with nerve damage show no symptoms at all. Most of the time, Peripheral Neuropathy starts with a loss of feeling in the toes, and then moves up limbs causing pain and loss of feeling in the feet and legs.

Symptoms of Peripheral Neuropathy may include pain, burning, tingling, numbness, cramping, and tightness. Some people say it feels like ants are crawling on their feet or it feels like they are wearing socks when they are barefoot. A feeling of heaviness in your legs can be a symptom, as well as a loss of balance. Other symptoms are loss of feeling in the feet, curling of the toes, weakness, and sharp, shooting pains in the legs and feet. The pain is often worse at night, and some patients find relief with walking.

Any one of these symptoms can result in difficulty in walking, sleepless nights, having a wider stance and a less rhythmic or fluid gait.

## What Causes Peripheral Neuropathy?

Peripheral Neuropathy is nerve damage that generally results from a systemic disease. Diabetes, Thyroid problems, Lupus, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Sjorgren’s Syndrome and Celiac Disease are just some of the diseases that can contribute to nerve damage. Nutritional deficiencies can cause Peripheral Neuropathy as well. Nutrition is often key to the reversal of Peripheral Neuropathy because certain nutrients help the nerve repair and regenerate. In my experience, using supplements in the treatment of neuropathy has been a real game-changer for many patients.

Unfortunately, a full 30% of Peripheral Neuropathy cases are referred to as idiopathic, meaning they come from an unknown cause.

The most common form of neuropathy is **Diabetic Peripheral Neuropathy**; up to 30% of the cases of Peripheral Neuropathy are caused by this disease. The fact is that having your blood sugar too high over a long period of time can cause nerve damage. Many patients today have high cholesterol, elevated blood pressure and are overweight. Together, the three issues are referred to as Metabolic Syndrome, Syndrome X, or being Pre-Diabetic. This group of patients is also at risk for Peripheral Neuropathy **before** they get Diabetes.

There are other diseases and conditions that can cause Peripheral Neuropathy. Kidney problems can lead to blood toxicity which can damage nerves. Infectious and inflammatory diseases such as Guillain-Barré Syndrome or HIV can damage nerves as well. In some cases, chemotherapy, exposure to toxic substances, heavy metal toxicity, recreational drug use, leprosy, and alcoholism can all result in damage to the peripheral nerves.

## What Are Possible Complications From Peripheral Neuropathy?

**Balance Impairments:** Burning, numbness, and tingling....can it get any worse? Unfortunately, it can. Untreated, Peripheral Neuropathy can cause you to develop balance impairments and often decreased lower leg strength. You may feel unsteady... like you are losing your balance. That’s because you may be unable to feel your feet as well as you would like. This puts you at risk for

falling and fall-related injuries. According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, every 14 seconds, an older adult is treated in the emergency room for a fall. Falls result more than 2.4 million injuries treated in emergency departments annually, including more than 772,000 hospitalizations. Simple things can be done to prevent life altering falls. We offer a **Risk Assessment for Falls** as part of your exam, and this is the single most powerful tool we have in fall prevention.



A Balance Assistance Device is a great way to increase stability if you have Peripheral Neuropathy. I recommend the Moore Balance Brace. This device goes down inside the shoe, comes up the leg a bit, and it provides the ankle with added support. It also provides proprioception, which means the ability to feel your foot in space so that you know where your foot is. The Moore Balance Brace helps people that have a little foot drag, what we call "drop foot". It helps eliminate drag so that when you go through the swing phase of gait, your toes can clear obstacles.

**Foot Ulcers:** Numbness from Peripheral Neuropathy can also cause foot ulcers. The most common ulcer I see is one that is under a callus. The patient does not feel the callus build up and then the skin breaks down underneath. The callus keeps it covered and the patient does not even know they have a hole in their foot. **Ulcers are treatable and even preventable once nerve function and feeling is restored.**





**Now that we have defined Peripheral Neuropathy and its many causes, let's take a look at what we can do about it.**

### **What Can a Podiatrist Do About Peripheral Neuropathy?**

Let's start at the beginning and answer the question, "What is a Podiatrist?"

A Podiatrist is a specialist who focuses on your feet and ankles. We are quite simply "The Experts" on your feet, heels, and ankles, and should be the very first doctor you call when you experience pain or other problems with them. In addition to lower extremity nerve pain, I've also listed many of the other problems podiatrists treat in this book.

The DPM after our name stands for Doctor of Podiatric Medicine. Most people know that Podiatrists deal with foot, heel, and ankle problems, and work with seniors, or diabetics, or people with poor circulation; what most people don't know is that podiatrists treat patients of all ages. A podiatrist is also well-qualified to help children and young adults with the problems that they can experience with their feet, heels, and ankles.

Podiatrists are required, just like any other doctor, to be licensed by the state in which they practice. When medically necessary, podiatrists can perform surgery to correct or remedy problems. Before we recommend surgery, we will explore the many conservative therapies and remedies that are available for our patients, and then recommend the very best course of treatment. As medical science advances and new therapies become available to the public, Podiatrists are increasingly able to offer their patients some of the most state-of-the-art care available.

The American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons (ACFAS) is a national medical specialty society with a membership of 6,800 foot and ankle surgeons. This organization provides continuing medical education and research opportunities for its members. My staff and I are constantly attending seminars, conventions and continuing education classes to learn the latest advancements and solutions to neuropathy and other foot and ankle conditions. This allows me to bring my best for my patients. I am proud to be a Fellow in the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons.



### **Additional Certification in Nerve Surgery**

Some Podiatrists undergo specialized training in the treatment of painful nerve conditions. There is an organization called The Association of Extremity Nerve Surgeons which provides advanced training in the medical, physiological, and surgical treatment of nerve conditions. Through this organization and other ongoing continuing medical education, some podiatrists choose to specialize in the treatment of this difficult and perplexing condition. Once the doctor has achieved adequate surgical experience and demonstrated proficiency in the procedures, they are qualified to apply for "fellow" status with this organization. He or she can then put FAENS after their name. I am proud to be a Fellow of the Association of Extremity Nerve Surgeons.



### **Diagnostic Tools**

The first step in treating lower extremity nerve pain is proper diagnosis. Due to poor localization of pain and a wide variety of symptoms, diagnosing Peripheral Neuropathy can be difficult. If you think you have any signs of this disease, it is important to schedule a comprehensive foot exam as soon as possible. Early detection is key in the reversal of Peripheral Neuropathy. In our office,

**To schedule your comprehensive foot exam, please call 830.569.FEET (830.569.3338)**



this begins with a series of questions about your symptoms, your medical history, including use of alcohol, risk of infection, and exposure to toxic substances. You will also be asked about your family's medical history related to nerve disease and diabetes.

The exam will continue with evaluating your muscle strength and sensation – the ability to feel, touch, temperature, and pain. Palpation and percussion techniques at key locations of known compressions and entrapments will be tested first to determine the overt signs of compression and neuropathy symptoms. Sensory testing can also be performed. Subtle decreases in sensory perception can be a significant clue as to the presence of Peripheral Neuropathy and nerve compression. Nerve density biopsies can also be performed in the skin to determine the presence of Peripheral Neuropathy.

Our latest addition to in-office neuropathy testing is a **SudoScan Evaluation**. The test is painless, takes about three minutes, and gives an accurate evaluation of the severity of nerve damage associated with neuropathy and other nerve conditions. This test is performed with electromagnetic plates and it measures the amount of sweating that occurs once a stimulus is placed onto the extremities. This test is repeatable, and enables us to measure treatment results on an ongoing basis.



XRays or an MRI may be done to determine if there are space-occupying or biomechanical structures affecting the nerve. Finally, blood tests may be run to find out if there are any underlying causes of neuropathy such as diabetes, thyroid disease, kidney disease, or vitamin deficiencies.

### **Treating the Cause**

The old saying “If you find yourself in a hole... stop digging” applies here. Once you are aware of Peripheral Neuropathy, the next step is treating the cause. If Peripheral Neuropathy is caused by Diabetes, it is imperative to get the blood glucose levels under control. If it is caused by alcohol, you should stop using alcohol. If the Peripheral Neuropathy is determined to be caused by vitamin deficiency or thyroid dysfunction these need to be addressed first. Sometimes no cause is determined. But, if you know what is contributing to your neuropathy, focus on those areas first.

### **Relieving the Pain with Prescription Medications**

You may have experience with using prescription medications to relieve your Peripheral Neuropathy pain. Prescription medications are often given in an attempt to help with more severe pain, numbness, tingling, and weakness. They may make the nerves *feel* better, but the nerves continue to die. **It is important to remember that prescription medications for Neuropathy are merely symptomatic treatments. They do NOTHING to help the nerves repair or regenerate.** The prescription medications used to treat neuropathy include antidepressants and anticonvulsants. Currently only two are approved by the FDA: the anticonvulsant Lyrica and the antidepressant Cymbalta. Others are used but not approved by the FDA. There are topical treatments available that can bring some relief of lower extremity nerve pain. I feel there are better methods of addressing Nerve Pain.

### **A Better Way to Treat Peripheral Neuropathy**

In our clinic, we use a 5-pronged approach to heal the nerves and reverse Peripheral Neuropathy.

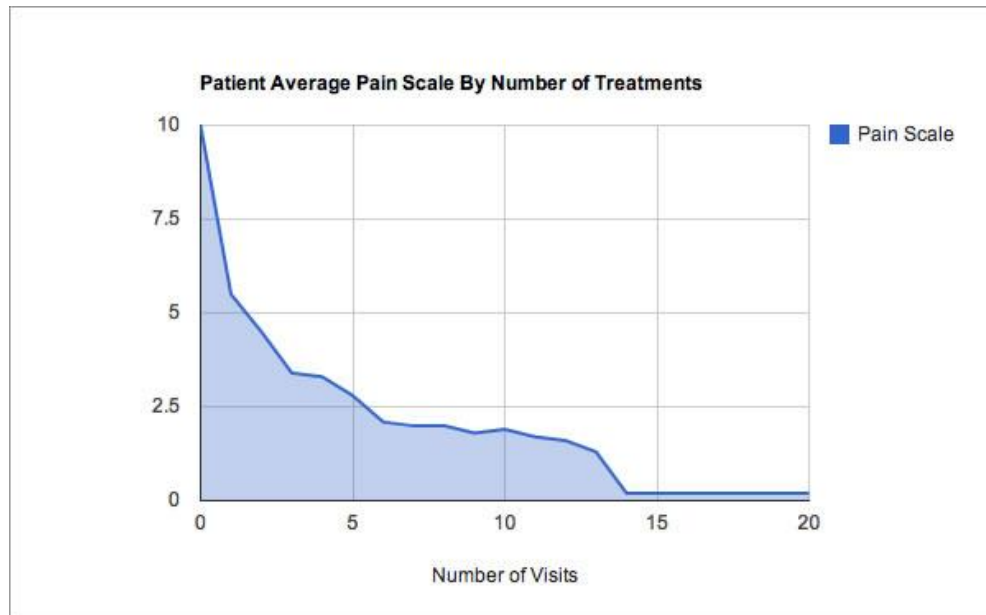
#### **1. Nutrition: Healing Nerves from the Inside Out**

We use nutritional supplements to increase our success rate in the treatment of Peripheral Neuropathy. We have been very gratified by the addition of this modality in the treatment of our patients. Approximately 70% of our patients that begin nutritional supplements, **which actually help the nerves repair and regenerate**, are able to discontinue their prescription medications. Some of the supplements we recommend include: L-Arginine, Benfotiamine, Magnesium, Acetyl-L-Carnitine and Alpha Lipoic Acid. We base our use of these supplements on clinical studies that have shown widespread success and nerve regeneration.

ALWAYS CHECK WITH YOUR PRIMARY CARE DOCTOR BEFORE STARTING ANY SUPPLEMENTS TO ENSURE COMPATIBILITY WITH CURRENT MEDICATIONS.

## 2. Exercise for the Nerves: Electrical Signal Therapy with Local Anesthesia Block

Another treatment we are using in our office which has been a real breakthrough for our patients is Electrical Signal Therapy (EST) with local anesthetic blocks. This in-office treatment requires 13 sessions of Peripheral Nerve Stimulation followed by local anesthetic injections. In Peripheral Nerve Stimulation, a small pulse generator sends electrical pulses to the nerves in your foot. These pulses interfere with the nerve impulses that make you feel pain and create that tingling feeling. Each session consists of two 20-minute applications. This combination allows the nerves to repair and regenerate allowing an improvement in nerve function. Pulse levels and locations change over the course of nerve healing, so **it is very important to understand that this treatment requires repeated applications over multiple weeks.**



The following is a quote from [Podiatry Today Magazine](#) Issue Number: [Volume 27 - Issue 7 - July 2014](#)

Author(s): Cynthia Cernak, DPM, Robert H. Odell, MD, PhD, and Peter Carney, MD

*“The clinical experiences of multiple physicians and podiatrists have shown that the application of combined electrochemical treatment favorably influences the peripheral vasculature and promotes nerve cell regeneration.<sup>10-13</sup> Long-term results of combined electrochemical treatment have led to little or no return of neuropathy symptoms. As the patients continue to improve, they are better able to exercise, maintain weight loss and control their blood sugar.”*

## 3. Lighting the Way to Relief: MLS Laser Therapy

At Next Step Foot & Ankle Clinic, we use MLS Laser Therapy to help improve nerve function and prevent ulcers, infection and amputation in our Diabetic Peripheral Neuropathy patients. About 80% of patients who have this treatment show significant improvement in symptoms and nerve regrowth. The MLS Laser is the cutting edge technology for laser therapy and has been shown to significantly improve nerve function. In a pilot study of 10 patients, during three short weeks of MLS Laser Therapy there was significant improvement in nerve function documented with nerve function test.

The study's conclusion is as follows:

*“MLS laser therapy applied to the Tibial and Peroneal nerves in persons with documented Diabetic Peripheral Neuropathy will lead to objective improvement in nerve function as demonstrated by NCS evaluation. A reasonable expectation is that this improvement in function will lead to improved sensibility in the feet. Improved sensibility interrupts the causal pathway leading to ulceration, infection and amputation. In this pilot study, MLS therapy appears to be uniquely capable of healing the injured nerve in DPN and shows great promise in the battle against the devastating sequelae of this disease.”--Rader A.*

## 4. Physical Therapy

Formal physical therapy might be prescribed to help increase muscle strength, build muscle control, and mobilize the nerve. A

technique called “neural gliding” may be used to help stretch and massage pain areas.

### **5. Free the nerve from the pinch: Nerve Decompression Surgery**

When other non-operative treatments fail, and compression of the nerve is playing a role in the nerve dysfunction, surgery may be the best option.

Sometimes nerve disease is like sleeping on your elbow wrong. You wake up and your hand is numb or tingling. “Peripheral Neuropathy” is sometimes caused by nerve compression. The nerve is just always being compressed. Nerve Decompression (neurolysis) Surgery allows the surgeon to open the tight area through which the nerves pass by dividing the anatomical structures that encase the nerve. As a result, damaged nerves are able to regenerate after they are able to move more freely and glide and slide within the body to start receiving proper blood flow.

This surgery is generally done on an outpatient basis, and patients are able to walk the same day. Results can include significant pain relief, increased sensation, and improvement in balance and gait. It is a soft tissue procedure and usually takes only a couple of weeks to be back to normal activity.

There is some pain and swelling that must be treated post-op.

It is very important that Nerve Decompression Surgery only be performed by an experienced and formally trained nerve surgeon. When performed by a well-trained surgeon, on the right patient, this procedure can be very gratifying and provide immediate relief of lower extremity pain. Podiatrists who are trained to do Nerve Decompression Surgery are also skilled at diagnosing the problem through physical examination, diagnostic studies, diagnostic imaging, and sensory nerve studies. In a review of 129 patients in published articles over a 10 year period the results of surgery demonstrated 88% of patients had a significant decrease in pain and 71% showed increase in sensitivity.

“I have been suffering from diabetic neuropathy for a very long time and have tried every shoe under the sun. I even tried all kinds of insoles including spending (over \$1,000 at The Good Foot Store) which did work for a couple of weeks, but were just a quick fix. I came to Dr. Silvester a couple of months ago and he found the root of the problem right away within two visits and gave me hope that I could walk and do more without the pain with surgery. I signed up right away and h[e]... was able to operate on my right foot. Because of the severe pain I was in, this was music to my ears. Needless to say I saw him today and we are now scheduling to operate on my left foot. I can't thank Dr. Silvester and the friendly, smiling faces that fill his office enough. I can honestly say I believe I will have a better quality of life because of them all.” :)

– Patient V.R.

## **The Comprehensive Approach**

**What sets us apart at Next Step Foot and Ankle Clinic is that we have the ability to customize your Peripheral Neuropathy Reversal Plan with multiple treatment options. To reverse Peripheral Neuropathy, often more than one therapy is needed to adequately provide relief and begin healing from this painful and devastating disease. You need the right nutrition combined with the right therapy. Most of our patients show significant improvement in quality of life and activity levels within 3 months. Don't give up hope, there is relief and we can help! Call today to schedule complete foot exam 830.569.3338.**

### **What else can we help you with?**

It is impossible to discuss all the potential problems that can affect the health of your feet in a book of this size, but here are the problems we see most often at our offices:

Arthritis, Bunions, Diabetic Foot Care, Wound Care, Fungal Nails, Hammertoes, Neuropathy, Metatarsalgia, Ingrown Toenails, P.A.D., Plantar Fasciitis (Heel Pain), Sprains, Stress Fractures, Warts, Wounds and Ulcers, and more. For detailed information on how we can help with these and other conditions, please visit our website at [www.silvesterfootclinic.com](http://www.silvesterfootclinic.com).

### **When to Call a Podiatrist**

Remember that foot, ankle, or heel pain is never normal regardless of age or activity.

Podiatrists treat foot problems for patients of all ages. You should call a podiatrist when you have pain in your feet or in your heels. If you notice that there is any change at all to your heels or the skin on your feet and ankles, you should see the “expert” on your feet.

If you suspect you may have lower extremity nerve pain, you should see your podiatrist right away. The sooner you get treatment for this type of condition, the better the outcome.

If you have Diabetes or poor circulation, and you develop any abnormal symptoms, you should see us immediately. You are at much greater risk for serious complications. And, you should see us at least once a year whether or not you have symptoms or pain. Regular checkups are a great way to help keep your feet healthy.

Most importantly, you should **call us first 830.569.3338** when you have pain or any issue that affects your feet.

### **What to Do If You Are in Severe Pain**

Pain is your body's way of telling you that something is wrong. It is usually true that the more severe the pain, the more serious the problem. If you are experiencing severe foot pain, call us right away. You can reach our offices by calling Next Step Foot and Ankle Clinic, your San Antonio Neuropathy Relief Center, at 830-569-FEET (569-3338). You may also get more information or request an appointment by visiting [www.saneuropathyrelief.com](http://www.saneuropathyrelief.com).

If you are experiencing a medical emergency, call 911.

### **Final Thoughts**

I hope you have found this publication to be helpful. My purpose in sharing it with you is to give you the information you need to take the appropriate actions to care for your feet. I hope it helps you understand Peripheral Neuropathy and what can be done to treat it and to keep it from returning. Don't give up hope! There is a better way --You CAN find relief and I can help!

Your next step to healthy feet is only a phone call away. Please make an appointment. Call 830.569.3338 and come see us to discuss how we can help you with Neuropathy or any foot problems you may be experiencing.

Dedicated to Your Health,



Darren Silvester, DPM, FACFAS, FAENS

**Free Copy of Dr. Silvester's first book,**

**"Why Do My Feet Hurt and What Can I Do About It?"**



We hope that you have enjoyed reading "*A Better Way to Treat Burning, Numbness, and Tingling of the Feet*". If you are having other foot or ankle issues, and want to know about options to alleviate your pain, contact our office to get a copy of Dr. Silvester's first publication "**Why Do My Feet Hurt and What Can I Do About It?**", which covers common foot issues that you may be worried about. If you have any friends or family members who might benefit from the information provided in this book, we would be happy to provide them with their own copy free of charge as well. Just tell them to visit our website at [www.saneuropathyreliefcenter.com](http://www.saneuropathyreliefcenter.com) to request it online or call us at 830-569-FEET (569-

3338).

## **Help A Friend Get A Free Copy of This Book!**

### ***“A Better Way to Treat Burning, Numbness, and Tingling of the Feet”***

If you have any friends or family members who might benefit from the information provided in this book, we would be happy to provide them with their own copy free of charge. Just tell them to visit our website at [www.saneuropathyreliefcenter.com](http://www.saneuropathyreliefcenter.com) to request it online, email us at [contactus@silvesterfootclinic.com](mailto:contactus@silvesterfootclinic.com) or call us at 830-569-3338 to make their request.

