

Latinos May Be at Increased Risk for Nerve Damage

Race and ethnicity may affect a person's risk for nerve damage, known as peripheral neuropathy, new research shows.

July 18, 2025 By Laura Schmidt

Latinos may be at increased risk for peripheral neuropathy compared with white people, according to a new study [published in Neurology](#). Peripheral neuropathy is defined as nerve damage that causes burning, tingling, [pain](#) and numbness in the hands and feet.

"In the United States, there is a higher prevalence of peripheral neuropathy among Hispanic and Black people than white people, and the underlying factors driving these differences are not well defined," said study author Evan Lee Reynolds, PhD, of Michigan State University in East Lansing, in a [news release](#).

Peripheral neuropathy can result from traumatic injuries, infections, metabolic problems, exposure to toxins and inherited causes, according to the [Mayo Clinic](#). In addition to weakness, numbness and pain, peripheral neuropathy can affect other body functions, including digestion and urination.

According to the Mayo Clinic, [risk factors](#) for neuropathy include:

- Diabetes, especially if sugar levels are not controlled well;
- Alcohol misuse;
- Low levels of vitamins in the body, especially vitamin B-12;
- Infections, such as Lyme disease, shingles, hepatitis B and C and HIV;
- Autoimmune diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis and lupus, in which the immune system attacks the body's own tissues;
- Kidney, liver or thyroid disorders.

For the study, researchers surveyed 8,014 people; of these, 55% were non-Hispanic white, 24% were Latino, 18% were Black and 3% were of another race or ethnicity. They were 61 years old on average, and about 13% of them had peripheral neuropathy.

The survey identified risk factors for neuropathy, including age and sex; health factors, such as waist circumference, blood sugar, [cholesterol](#) levels and blood pressure; lifestyle factors, such as [physical activity](#) and [diet](#); and social factors, including food security, household income and [health insurance](#).

“Race and ethnicity are social constructs without a biological basis and may be proxy, a substitute or indicator, for hard-to-measure risk factors,” Reynolds said. “We looked at a wide range of known risk factors...and found that Hispanic people still had a higher risk of neuropathy even after those risk factors were considered.”

After adjusting for only age and sex, researchers found that Latinos and Black people had a higher risk for peripheral neuropathy compared with white people. After adjusting for health, lifestyle and social risk factors, Latinos had a 32% increased risk for peripheral neuropathy compared with white people.

Being uninsured and having [food insecurity](#) increased Latinos’ risk for peripheral neuropathy by 56% and 48%, respectively.

“After comprehensively adjusting for known risk factors, we found that Black people had similar odds of neuropathy compared to white people, whereas Hispanic people continued to be at an increased likelihood of having neuropathy,” Reynolds said. “Therefore, it is likely that unknown social risk factors exist for this population. Identifying additional risk factors for Hispanic people should be the focus of future studies.”