H

Hyperesthesia

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Definition

Hyperesthesia refers to increased sensitivity to sensory stimulation, such as touch or temperature. The term derives from the Greek *hyper* (over) and *aisthesis* (feeling) and is usually used in relation to cutaneous sensation. It is most commonly expressed in terms of increased pain sensitivity.

Current Knowledge

The most common cause of hyperesthesia is peripheral neuropathy, such as might occur with diabetes or chronic alcohol abuse. Frequently described as a chronic burning type pain, it can also manifest as increased sensitivity to touch. In extreme cases, patients may not even be able to tolerate any type of covering over their feet while in bed. Thalamic lesions, particularly those involving the posterior thalamus, can also be associated with increased pain syndromes. Such

lesions may initially produce a loss or decrease in sensation on the contralateral side of the body, but after a period of time the patient may begin experiencing distressing pain on the side contralateral to the lesion. Such pain generally takes on more of the characteristics of the kind of pain mediated by the paleospinothalamic system (i.e., poorly localized, aching or burning type of pain). It can often be set off by minimal stimuli and will tend to persist and/or expand well beyond the time and space parameters of the eliciting stimulus. It should also be recalled that pain is a subjective symptom and can be influenced by one's mental or emotional state, such as depression.

Cross-References

► [Paresthesia](#)

References and Readings

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