LATERAL FEMORAL CUTANEOUS NEUROPATHY (MERALGIA PARESTHETICA)

The lateral femoral cutaneous nerve arises from the upper lumbar plexus (spinal levels L2/3), crosses through the inguinal ligament near its attachment to the iliac bone, and supplies sensation to the anterior lateral thigh. The neuropathy affecting this nerve is also known as meralgia paresthetica. Symptoms and signs consist of paresthesias, numbness, and occasionally pain in the lateral thigh. Symptoms are increased by standing or walking and are relieved by sitting. There is normal strength, and knee reflexes are intact. The diagnosis is clinical, and further tests usually are not performed. EDx is only needed to rule out lumbar plexopathy, radiculopathy, or femoral neuropathy. If the symptoms and signs are classic, EMG is not necessary. Symptoms often resolve spontaneously over weeks or months, but the patient may be left with permanent numbness. Treatment consists of weight loss and avoiding tight belts. Analgesics in the form of a lidocaine patch, nonsteroidal agents, and occasionally medications for neuropathic pain can be used (Table 459-6). Rarely, locally injecting the nerve with an anesthetic can be tried. There is no role for surgery.

FEMORAL NEUROPATHY

Femoral neuropathies can arise as complications of retroperitoneal hematoma, lithotomy positioning, hip arthroplasty or dislocation, iliac artery occlusion, femoral arterial procedures, infiltration by hematogenous malignancy, penetrating groin trauma, pelvic surgery including hysterectomy and renal transplantation, and diabetes (a partial form of lumbosacral diabetic plexopathy); some cases are idiopathic. Patients with femoral neuropathy have difficulty extending their knee and flexing the hip. Sensory symptoms occurring either on the anterior thigh and/or medial leg occur in only half of reported cases. A prominent painful component is the exception rather than the rule, may be delayed, and is often self-limited in nature. The quadriceps (patellar) reflex is diminished.

SCIATIC NEUROPATHY

Sciatic neuropathies commonly complicate hip arthroplasty, pelvic procedures in which patients are placed in a prolonged lithotomy position, trauma, hematomas, tumor infiltration, and vasculitis. In addition, many sciatic neuropathies are idiopathic. Weakness may involve all motions of the ankles and toes as well as flexion of the leg at the knee; abduction and extension of the thigh at the hip are spared. Sensory loss occurs in the entire foot and the distal lateral leg. The ankle jerk and on occasion the internal hamstring reflex are diminished or more typically absent on the affected side. The peroneal subdivision of the sciatic nerve is typically involved disproportionately to the tibial counterpart. Thus, patients may have only ankle dorsiflexion and eversion weakness with sparing of knee flexion, ankle inversion, and plantar flexion; these features can lead to misdiagnosis of a common peroneal neuropathy.

PERONEAL NEUROPATHY

The sciatic nerve divides at the distal femur into the tibial and peroneal nerve. The common peroneal nerve passes posterior and laterally around the fibular head, under the fibular tunnel. It then divides into the superficial peroneal nerve, which supplies the ankle evertor muscles and sensation over the anterolateral distal leg and dorsum of the foot, and the deep peroneal nerve, which supplies ankle dorsiflexors and toe extensor muscles and a small area of sensation dorsally in the area of the first and second toes.

Symptoms and signs consist of footdrop (ankle dorsiflexion, toe extension, and ankle eversion weakness) and variable sensory loss, which may involve the superficial and deep peroneal pattern. There is usually no pain. Onset may be on awakening in the morning. Peroneal neuropathy needs to be distinguished from L5 radiculopathy. In L5 radiculopathy, ankle invertors and evertors are weak and needle EMG reveals denervation. EDx can help localize the lesion. Peroneal motor conduction velocity shows slowing and amplitude drop across the fibular head. Management consists of rapid weight loss and avoiding leg crossing. Footdrop is treated with an ankle brace. A knee pad can be worn over the lateral knee to avoid further compression. Most cases spontaneously resolve over weeks or months.

RADICULOPATHIES

Radiculopathies are most often due to compression from degenerative joint disease and herniated disks, but there are a number of unusual etiologies (Table 459-9). Degenerative spine disease affects a number of different structures, which narrow the diameter of the neural foramen or canal of the spinal column and compromise nerve root integrity; these are discussed in detail in Chap. 22.

PLEXOPATHIES

BRACHIAL PLEXUS

The brachial plexus is composed of three trunks (upper, middle, and lower), with two divisions (anterior and posterior) per trunk (Fig. 459-2). Subsequently, the trunks divide into three cords (medial, lateral, and posterior), and from these arise the multiple terminal nerves innervating the arm. The anterior primary rami of C5 and C6 fuse to form the upper trunk; the anterior primary ramus of C7 continues as the middle trunk, while the anterior rami of C8 and T1 join to form the lower trunk. There are several disorders commonly associated with brachial plexopathy.

Immune-Mediated Brachial Plexus Neuropathy Immune-mediated brachial plexus neuropathy (IBPN) goes by various terms, including *acute brachial plexitis*, *neuralgic amyotrophy*, and *Parsonage-Turner syndrome*. IBPN usually presents with an acute onset of severe pain in the shoulder region. The intense pain usually lasts several days to a few weeks, but a dull ache can persist. Individuals who are affected may not appreciate weakness of the arm early in the course because the pain limits movement. However, as the pain dissipates, weakness and often sensory loss are appreciated. Attacks can occasionally recur.

Clinical findings are dependent on the distribution of involvement (e.g., specific trunk, divisions, cords, or terminal nerves). The most common pattern of IBPN involves the upper trunk or a single or multiple mononeuropathies primarily involving the suprascapular, long thoracic, or axillary nerves. Additionally, the phrenic and anterior interosseous nerves may be concomitantly affected. Any of these nerves may also be affected in isolation. EDx is useful to confirm and localize the site(s) of involvement. Empirical treatment of severe pain with glucocorticoids is often used in the acute period.

Brachial Plexopathies Associated with Neoplasms Neoplasms involving the brachial plexus may be primary nerve tumors, local cancers expanding into the plexus (e.g., Pancoast lung tumor or lymphoma),

TABLE 459-9 CAUSES OF RADICULOPATHY

- Herniated nucleus pulposus
- Degenerative joint disease
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Trauma
- Vertebral body compression fracture
- Pott's disease
- Compression by extradural mass (e.g., meningioma, metastatic tumor, hematoma, abscess)
- Primary nerve tumor (e.g., neurofibroma, schwannoma, neurinoma)
- Carcinomatous meningitis
- Perineurial spread of tumor (e.g., prostate cancer)
- Acute inflammatory demyelinating polyradiculopathy
- Chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyradiculopathy
- Sarcoidosis
- Amyloidoma
- Diabetic radiculopathy
- Infection (Lyme disease, herpes zoster, cytomegalovirus, syphilis, schistosomiasis, strongyloides)