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Abdul says odd behavior not drug-related

By César G. Soriano, USA TODAY

American Idol judge Paula Abdul, responding to questions about her erratic behavior on the hit Fox talent show, says she is suffering from a rare neurological disorder and does not have a drug problem.



Abdul: *Idol* judge says she has a rare neurological disorder.

By Paul Hawthorne, Getty Images

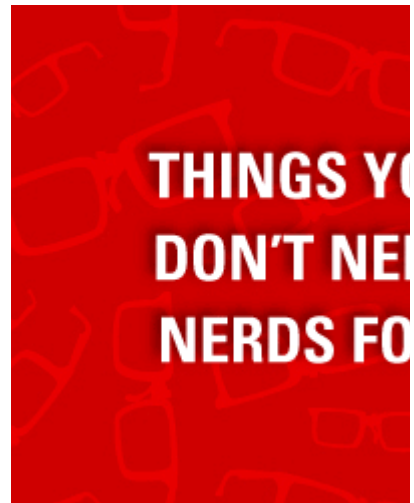
"Drugs? I'm not addicted to pills of any kind," Abdul says in the new issue of *People* magazine (on newsstands Friday).

Abdul, 42, says she has been battling chronic pain that began after a cheerleading accident at age 17 left her with an injured disc in her neck.

The pain got worse after "a couple of car accidents" in the 1980s and a plane crash in 1992, which led to seizures, bulimia and depression, she says. In search of relief, Abdul had 12 operations and used medications she says left her so "loopy" that she chose to live with the pain.

The turning point came last summer, she says, when she began taking Enbrel, an anti-inflammatory drug normally used to treat rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis.

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A spokeswoman for the drug says it does not have psychological side effects.

In November, Abdul says, she was diagnosed with Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy (aka Complex Regional Pain syndrome), a chronic neurological disorder that causes severe, debilitating pain. It affects 500,000 to 1 million Americans and is more prevalent in women, according to the Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Syndrome Association.

The disease is treatable and usually involves physical and sometimes psychological therapy, says Norman Harden, director of the Center for Pain Studies at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago. "People can do well and get on with their lives."

Abdul says she kept her condition secret from her fellow *Idol* judges but decided to go public after reading message boards about her behavior on and off the set.

"Between getting up and dancing at the drop of a hat, and her refusal to let Simon (Cowell) finish a sentence ... she's become both distracting and annoying," says *Idol* fan Steve Walker of Memphis.

Abdul says she is now pain-free, and her happy-go-lucky demeanor is proof of how good she feels.

"If people only knew what I've gone through with pain and pills. I'm dancing for joy at the fact that not even a year ago I was in so much pain I could barely get up," she tells *People*.

Last month, she was sentenced to two years' probation after pleading no contest to a misdemeanor count of hit-and-run driving.

Idol producers and her castmates declined to comment on Wednesday.

"It was getting ugly with the lies people were saying," Abdul tells *Entertainment Tonight* in an interview airing today and Friday. "It was time to set the record straight. I want America to know that I have never been addicted to anything, no chemical dependency, nothing for recreational purposes."

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