

Neuropathy

Chemotherapy can cause damage to your nerves leading to a range of problems and symptoms. This condition is called neuropathy. Peripheral neuropathy is a type of neuropathy that affects the sensations and movements of your arms and legs. Peripheral neuropathy often affects both sides of the body the same. In most cases, symptoms of peripheral neuropathy start in the feet and over time may affect the hands, too.

Common symptoms:

- Tingling, burning, weakness, or numbness in your hands or feet
- Losing your balance or feeling clumsy
- Tripping or stumbling while walking
- Feeling cold more than you used to
- Trouble picking up objects or buttoning your clothes
- Stomach pain or heartburn
- Constipation
- Trouble passing urine
- Trouble swallowing
- Hearing loss
- Pain
- Dizziness

Neuropathy can begin any time after your first treatment. Sometimes it gets worse as treatments go on. Neuropathy can be short-term, fade over a year or two after treatment ends, or it may last for the rest of your life.

Talk to your doctor or nurse right away about any signs of neuropathy that you may have. They will want to watch the signs to see if they get worse.

What you can do

- Take your medications as ordered and extra pain medications if you need them.
- Turn down your water heater to keep from burning yourself in the bath or shower.
- Be careful when handling knives, scissors or other sharp objects since you may not feel it if you cut yourself.
- Wear sneakers or well-fitting shoes with rubber soles to protect your feet.
- Check your feet daily to see if you have any sores or redness.
- Don't drink alcohol. It can make neuropathy worse.
- Steady yourself when you walk by using a cane or other device.
- If you have diabetes, control your blood sugar. High blood sugar levels can damage nerves.
- Avoid things that seem to make your neuropathy worse such as hot or cold temperatures, or snug clothes or shoes.

Treating neuropathy:

Treatment is mostly done to relieve the pain that can come with neuropathy.

- Steroids — short term only
- Patches or creams of numbing medicine that can be put on the painful area
- Anti-depressant medications — often in smaller doses than are used to treat depression
- Anti-convulsion medicines
- Pain medications such as opioids or narcotics for severe pain

Other treatments:

- Occupational therapy
- Physical therapy and exercise
- Relaxation therapy
- Acupuncture
- Transcutaneous Stimulation (TENS) or High-Frequency (HF) External Muscle Stimulation

From: American Cancer Society: www.cancer.org

For more information:

Neuropathy Association: www.neuropathy.org

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke: www.ninds.nih.gov