

What is cancer-related peripheral neuropathy?

Cancer-related peripheral neuropathy can be caused by cancer or its treatment. Peripheral neuropathy means nerves in your body have been damaged.

What are the symptoms of peripheral neuropathy?

Symptoms of peripheral neuropathy depend on which nerves are affected and how bad the injury is to the nerves.

Symptoms include:

- Numbness, tingling (pins and needles) or burning feeling in the hands or feet
- Trouble picking up an object or buttoning your shirt or blouse
- Muscle weakness that causes you to have trouble walking, climbing stairs or brushing your teeth
- Odd sensations such as heat or burning when touching something cold
- Constipation or bloating
- Dizziness or blurred vision

Peripheral nerve damage may be short-lived but it may take a few months or even years before it goes away. Sometimes, peripheral nerve damage may not go away.

What can I do to manage my peripheral neuropathy?

1. Take medication as prescribed

Medications may help ease pain.

Your doctor may prescribe these medicines to relieve nerve pain or discomfort:

- Gabapentin (Neurontin)
- Amitriptyline (Elavil)
- Pregabalin (Lyrica)

2. Ask your doctor about medical options

There are medical options which may help to strengthen your muscles and improve coordination and balance.

- Physiotherapy can help with exercise programs and assistive tools
- Occupational therapists can help you with footwear ideas and finding useful tools to help with activities
- Podiatrists can help care for your feet

3. Complementary Therapies

Some patients find that complementary therapies help manage peripheral neuropathy.

These therapies include:

- Acupuncture
- Massage therapy
- Relaxation exercises
- Meditation

4. Take care of your body

If you have peripheral neuropathy, you will need to learn ways to cope with the symptoms.

- Take care of your feet → wear loose cotton socks and protective shoes with good support. Check your skin daily to look for any cuts or bruises
- Massage your feet and hands → this may help ease stiffness (be careful to wash off slippery oils or lotions)
- Take care of your nerves → limit alcohol or any other drugs that might make you unsteady
- Use helpful tools → special pens, pencils, knives and forks can be easier to hold. Special tools (e.g. zipper pulls, buttoners and stretchy shoe laces) can help you get dressed

5. Be safe

Safety is important for people with peripheral neuropathy due to the lack of feeling, lessened strength or muscle control. You may be at risk for falls.

Follow these helpful safety tips for your home:

- Have well-lit spaces, such as having a night light to light the way to the bathroom
- Make sure there are handrails on both sides of all stairways
- In the bathroom use non-skid strips or mats in the tub or shower
- Clean up any spills right away so you don't slip
- Avoid sudden movements and take time when getting up from sitting
- Don't walk in bare feet
- Check the temperature of the water with a part of your body that has normal sensation to avoid scalding yourself
- Use rubber gloves when washing dishes
- In the kitchen use lightweight and non-breakable glass, knives, forks and plates

If you drive, talk with your health care team. You may have trouble lifting your foot from the gas pedal to the brake when you are driving.