

Neuropathy is a term that describes the pain and discomfort caused by nerve damage. Also called ‘peripheral neuropathy,’ it can be caused by cancer treatment. This fact sheet covers:

- The feelings and effects of nerve damage
- How nerve damage can be managed
- Cold temperatures and nerve damage
- Nerve damage after treatment



Symptoms of Nerve Damage

Cancer treatment, especially chemotherapy, can cause nerve damage. The sensations can include tingling, burning, weakness or numbness, mostly in the hands and feet. Sometimes they are described as prickling or a feeling of ‘pins and needles.’

Other symptoms may include difficulty picking up objects or buttoning clothing, problems with balance, difficulty walking and hearing loss.



Managing Nerve Damage

Let your health care team know if you are feeling any symptoms of nerve damage. They can help determine whether other health issues play a part, such as diabetes or physical trauma. They may also discuss adjusting your medicine or treatment schedules.

It’s a good idea to keep track of your neuropathy symptoms in a journal or health care notebook. These are details that you can share with your health care team:

- Specific symptoms you experience
- What part of the body your symptoms affected
- Any preexisting health conditions
- Any medications you are taking
- Questions you may have for your doctor

Be extra careful when handling hot, sharp or dangerous objects. And use handrails on stairs and in the tub or shower. If you have trouble with fine motor skills, such as buttoning a shirt, occupational therapy may help.



Neuropathy and Cold Weather

Cold weather causes your body to slow its blood circulation in order to keep the body's core temperature up. This can affect blood flow to the hands and feet. Not only can this increase the feelings of tingling and numbness, it can reduce your ability to recognize how cold you are.

Tips to lessen the pain and lower your risk of further nerve damage:

- Wear warm, dry clothing in cold weather, including thick socks, mittens and gloves.
- Take breaks from the cold to reduce your exposure.
- Limit or avoid caffeine before an outing as it can cause blood vessels to narrow.
- Do not smoke as cigarette smoke can slow circulation.
- Limit alcohol use since excessive consumption can lead to vitamin deficiency which can, in turn, damage peripheral nerves.



Nerve Damage After Treatment Ends

Neuropathy that is related to cancer treatment often goes away, but this can take time. For some, this can take weeks or months. For others, the symptoms may last for a while or become chronic. Many factors impact the degree to which someone experiences neuropathy including:

- The type of chemotherapy drugs used.
- The chemotherapy dosage.
- The overall length of the treatment regimen.

In addition, each person responds in different ways. There are number of treatments available to help manage the continuing pain and discomfort caused by neuropathy. Talk to your health care team about what option is best for you.

CancerCare® Can Help

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