

Living With and Beyond Cancer Information Sheet

18. Tingling hands & feet

Tingling in the hands and/or feet in cancer patients is commonly a symptom of nerve damage known as peripheral neuropathy. Peripheral neuropathy develops when nerves in the body's extremities –such as the hands, feet and arms, are damaged. This is often caused by certain types of chemotherapy drugs particularly for bowel cancer, lymphoma and myeloma but may also be due to the tumour itself either by growing close to the nerve or more rarely by the tumour producing nerve-damaging substances. Much less frequently, surgery and radiotherapy may cause nerve damage resulting in tingling of the hands and feet. The symptoms depend on which nerves are affected. Diet and alcohol intake, along with other factors can cause tingling particularly if the body has reduced levels of vitamins E and B.

Symptoms of Peripheral Neuropathy

The main symptoms include:

- Numbness and tingling in the feet and hands
- Burning stabbing or shooting pain in affected areas
- Loss of balance and co-ordination
- Muscle weakness, especially in the feet
- These symptoms are usually constant but can come and go

How can I manage these symptoms?

- You should discuss any tingling sensations with your oncology doctor. Some types of drugs can alter nerve impulses and so help to relieve nerve pain. The feeling may need to be tolerated but it might be reassuring to speak to your doctor about it.
- Unlike most other types of pain, neuropathetic pain doesn't usually get better with common painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen so other medications are often used.
- It is important to ensure that you have a healthy diet high in fruit and vegetables, and reduce your alcohol intake.
- Keeping the affected area warm (for example by wearing gloves or warm socks) may help reduce milder tingling feelings.
- Using an elbow to test bath or washing up water will help to prevent harming the hands or feet.
- Wear well-fitting shoes or boots.
- Capsaicin cream—If your pain is confined to a particular area of your body and you can't, or would prefer not to, take the medications above, you may benefit from using capsaicin cream. Capsaicin is the substance that makes chilli peppers hot and is thought to work in neuropathetic pain by stopping the nerves sending pain messages to the brain. A pea-sized amount of capsaicin cream is rubbed on the painful area of skin three to four times a day. Side effects of capsaicin cream can include skin irritation and a burning sensation in the treated area when you first start treatment. **Do not use capsaicin cream on broken or inflamed skin and always wash your hands after applying it.**

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- Resources/Information

Local Resources:

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| Other resources: | GP, oncology doctor, Clinical Nurse Specialist and chemotherapy nurse. |
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National Resources:

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| NHS UK www.nhs.uk/conditions/peripheral-neuropathy/treatment/ | Online information and advice for peripheral neuropathy. |
| Macmillan Cancer Support Line www.macmillan.org.uk Call 0808 808 00 00 7 days a week 8:00am—8:00pm | Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. Please note that calls to this number are not free when made from outside the UK. If you are calling from outside of the UK call on +44 207 091 2230 |
| Macmillan on-line Community | Online support— to share experiences or vent your emotions find others who understand—join today! |
| Marie Curie Support Line — Living with a terminal illness and looking for support www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/marie-curie-support | Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. The Support Line is open Monday to Friday - 08:00am – 6:00pm Saturday -11:00am – 5:00pm |
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Other Resources :

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| Macmillan Booklets: | Managing the symptoms of cancer MAC11671 |
| | Understanding Chemotherapy MAC11619_E15 |
| | Understanding Radiotherapy MAC11640_E12_N |
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