



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Managing Peripheral Neuropathy

This information describes ways to manage peripheral neuropathy, including ways to manage symptoms and tips for staying safe while you have peripheral neuropathy.

For information about peripheral neuropathy, including its causes and symptoms, read the resource *About Peripheral Neuropathy* (www.mskcc.org/pe/about_peripheral_neuropathy).

If you have peripheral neuropathy, you may have a hard time feeling small injuries. It's important to regularly check your skin for cuts, burns, and scrapes. Give special attention to your hands and feet. It's also helpful to make healthy lifestyle changes. For example, try to:

- Exercise regularly.
- Quit smoking, if you smoke.
- Eat healthy meals. You can read the resource *Eat Your Way to Better Health* (www.mskcc.org/pe/eat_better_health) for more information.
- Avoid drinking large amounts of alcohol.
- Keep track of your blood glucose if you have diabetes.
- Take good care of your skin and feet, especially if you have diabetes.

Read the sections below for more tips for managing peripheral neuropathy.

Avoid Driving

Because peripheral neuropathy can cause decreased feeling in your hands and feet, driving is sometimes not safe. Ask your healthcare provider if it's safe for you

to drive based on your symptoms. A rehabilitation specialist may need to assess you to see if it's safe for you to drive.

Make Your Home Safe

It's helpful for you and a family member or friend to look through each room in your house to make sure it's free of hazards. You should also look through your garage, yard, car, and workplace to make sure they're safe.

Install lights

Because you won't feel things the way you used to, you will depend more on visual cues. Your rooms should be well-lit so you don't fall.

- Install light switches or put lamps at every doorway. The light switch or lamp should be easy to see and turn on from the doorway.
- Turn lights on before you enter a room. The room should be bright enough for you to see all the areas where you walk or do activities.
- Always turn lights on before you enter a stairway. This includes all stairways, both inside and outside of your home.
- Use floor lights that shine light up from the floor toward the ceiling or wall to help reduce glare.
- Keep night lights in your room and along the path you walk at night if you get up to use the bathroom.
- Keep a flashlight with you or within reach to use when you need more light.
- Use a keychain with a light to help you see keyholes.

Stairs

- Install handrails on both sides of all stairways and hallways.
- Cover stairs with a non-slip surface.
- Paint stairs in a light color to make them easier to see.
- Clear stairways and hallways of objects, such as small area rugs, toys, and

clutter.

Floors

- Floors should have non-glare and non-skid surfaces.
- If you use area rugs, make sure they have non-slip backing.
- Tape or tack down carpet edges securely.
- If your carpets or area rugs have high edges that you could trip over, think about replacing them with a thinner rug.
- Wipe up spills and liquids right away.

Bedroom

- Don't use furniture with wheels, such as chairs, tables, night stands, or over-bed tables.
- Remove small area rugs, stools, clothes, shoes, and clutter from walkways through your bedroom.
- If you use extension cords, use electric tape to secure them along the edge of the floor.
- Remove furniture with sharp edges or corners.

Bathroom

- Use bathtub or sink area rugs with non-slip backing.
- Use non-skid strips or mats in tubs and showers.
- Use portable hand grips over the tub or install shower grips.
- Use a non-breakable water thermometer to check the temperature of your bath water. Make sure the temperature is below 110 °F (43.3 °C).
- Use a liquid soap dispenser, soap on a rope, or a wash mitt to hold your soap.
- Use long brushes for hard-to-reach areas of your body.
- Use adapted nail clippers to cut your nails. You can buy these at a health supply

store.

- Avoid slippery, wet floors. Wipe up liquids right away.

Kitchen

- If you have an area rug near the sink, use one with non-slip backing.
- Use rubber gloves to wash dishes.
- Use a non-breakable water thermometer to check the dishwater temperature before you wash dishes. Make sure the water is not hotter than 110 °F (43.3 °C).
- Use lightweight, non-breakable glasses, utensils, and plates.
- Shield your fingers when cutting foods.
- Open jars or soda cans with easy jar openers, grippers, or tab grabbers.
- Use heavy-duty pot holders and oven mitts to handle items such as hot pots or pans.

Garage or yard

- Absorb oil spills with sand or kitty litter.
- Store rakes, shovels, and other pieces of garden equipment off the floor.
- Keep nails, screws, and other hardware in containers with covers.
- Keep walkways clear of toys, wet rags, ropes, hoses, buckets, and other clutter.
- Always wear rubber shoes or work boots and gloves when you work in the garage or garden.
- Don't use lawn mowers, electric branch trimmers or saws, or snow blowers.

Getting Dressed

Buy special equipment

You may want to buy special equipment to help you dress. You can find the following items at a health supply store or online:

- Zipper pulls
- Buttoners
- Molded sock aids
- Elastic shoe laces
- Velcro® straps
- Instep or arch supports for slippers and shoes
- Cuff and collar extenders
- Lightweight dressing sticks to put on garments without bending

You can also buy special pens, pencils, and utensils that are easier to hold.

Think about your clothing

When choosing what to wear, it may be helpful to:

- Wear shoes that go over the instep of your feet.
- Wear gloves and warm socks in cold weather.
- Wear jewelry that you can put on without help, such as jewelry without fasteners.

You may also want to wear socks and shoes to protect your feet.

Exercise and Massage

Exercising regularly and doing self-massage will improve your health and help you manage your symptoms.

- Walking is good exercise for your health and helps keep your muscles flexible.
- Low-back stretches and calf stretches also helps keep your muscles flexible.
- Foot and hand massages may help relieve stiffness. If you use lotion or cream for the massage, make sure you clean it off your hands and feet after the massage. They can be slippery.

If you exercise in a gym, tell the instructor that you have peripheral neuropathy. They will tell you what equipment is safe for you to use.

If your physical therapist (PT) or occupational therapist (OT) gave you exercises to do at home, make sure to do them following their instructions.

Complementary Therapies

Complementary therapies are therapies can be used to complement (go along with) your other treatments. Examples include:

- Relaxation techniques
- Biofeedback
- Yoga
- Meditation
- Guided imagery
- Acupuncture

If you're interested in complementary therapies, ask your healthcare provider for a referral to MSK's Integrative Medicine service. You can also visit their website at www.mskcc.org/integrativemedicine.

Ask for Help

Your doctor or nurse can prescribe medications to help with your symptoms. They can also refer you to healthcare providers who can help you.

- A PT can help with exercise programs and assistive devices (such as a cane, wheelchair, or walker).
- An OT can help you find adaptive devices (items that are easier to use, such as those listed in the "Buy special equipment" section) for work or home.
- A podiatrist (foot specialist) can help you care for your feet.

If you have any questions about these services, talk with a member of your

healthcare team.

Resources

The Foundation for Peripheral Neuropathy can give you general information about peripheral neuropathy. They also have support groups. For more information, call 877-883-9942 or visit at www.foundationforpn.org.

Contact Your Doctor or Nurse If:

- You have numbness that's getting worse.
- You have tingling that's getting worse.
- You have loss of function that's getting worse.
- You have pain that's getting worse.
- The medication you're taking isn't helping with your symptoms.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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