Understanding and Managing Peripheral Neuropathy in Cancer Care

Peripheral neuropathy means damage to nerves that run through your body. These nerves carry messages to and from your brain and spinal cord. They help you feel, move, and control some body functions. Cancer treatment and other health problems can affect these nerves.

What can peripheral neuropathy feel like?

- Tingling or a “pins and needles” feeling.
- Numbness in your fingers, toes, hands, or feet.
- Burning, shooting pain, or pain from light touch.
- Trouble feeling heat, cold, cuts, or sores.
- Weakness, cramps, or trouble with balance.
- Trouble buttoning clothes, opening jars, or walking.
- Symptoms may come and go or stay constant. They may spread up your arms or legs. Tell your care team even if symptoms seem mild.

Why does it happen, and will it improve?

- Some cancer treatments can damage nerves. Cancer itself can also affect nerves. Other possible causes include diabetes and vitamin problems. Your care team can check what may be causing your symptoms.
- Symptoms may improve after treatment ends. For some people, they last months or longer. Your care team can help you manage symptoms that remain.

What can you do to help prevent problems?

- Report new or worsening symptoms promptly. Do not wait for your next routine visit.
- Ask before trying supplements or tight gloves to prevent neuropathy. Their benefit is uncertain. Some supplements may cause harm.
- If you have diabetes, work with your care team to manage your blood sugar.
- Cold gloves may help prevent neuropathy. Ask your care team if this is right for you.

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How can you and your care team manage it?

- Describe your symptoms and when they started. Tell your team if activities like walking, sleeping, or using your hands are harder to do.
- If symptoms affect daily tasks, discuss your treatment plan. Your team may consider a delay, a lower dose, or a different treatment. Do not change treatment on your own.
- Management depends on your symptoms. Medicine may help nerve pain. Your care team can discuss whether medicine or other approaches are right for you.
- Ask about other ways to manage symptoms. Physical therapy may help with strength and balance. Exercise and acupuncture may help with your symptoms.
- Choose exercise that fits your balance and grip. Ask your care team which activities are safe for you. A stationary bike may be safer if walking feels unsteady. If you might drop free weights, ask about weight machines or resistance bands.

How can you stay safe in daily life?

- Tell your team about any falls or times you almost fell. Your care team may check your strength, feeling, and balance to assess your risk of falling.
- Report cuts, burns, or other injuries, even if you did not feel them.
- Wear shoes that cover your feet, even indoors. Check your hands and feet each day for cuts or sores.
- Clear loose rugs and cords from walkways. Use lights at night. Hold railings or use a walking aid if advised.
- Get up slowly if you feel dizzy. Ask for help with tasks that feel unsafe.
- Use care with sharp tools and hot items. Check water temperature before washing. Ask for help if you cannot feel heat well.
- If you cannot feel the car pedals well, do not drive. Tell your care team.

Call your care team promptly if you have:

- New tingling, numbness, burning, pain, weakness, or dizziness
- Symptoms that worsen or affect walking, balance, or hand use.
- A fall, a new wound, or an injury you did not feel.
- New or worsening trouble passing urine. This can sometimes happen with nerve damage.

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Nerve Care Notes

Use this space to record your care team's instructions. Ask about anything that is unclear.

Information to keep handy	Notes
Which symptoms should I watch for?	
What should I do if symptoms worsen?	
Who should I call during and after office hours?	
Which activities are safe for me?	
When will my symptoms be checked again?	
What medicines do I take for nerve pain?	

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Notes

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