

Chemotherapy-induced Neuropathy

Neuropathy

Neuropathy can be a long-lasting side effect of chemotherapy. It is caused by injury or irritation to nerves during treatment which can affect nerves in your arms, hands, fingers, legs, feet or toes.

Injury or irritation can develop days to months after starting chemotherapy. It can also develop after your treatment is done.

Symptoms can increase as you receive more doses of chemotherapy and other medicines used to treat cancer.

Symptoms

You may have symptoms such as numbness, tingling or burning. Neuropathy can also affect your ability to feel pain or temperature, as well as your mobility due to pain or decreased sensation.

Symptoms often improve after treatment is finished, but for some, nerve damage can be permanent.

It is important for your health care provider to know if you are experiencing symptoms of neuropathy so that your discomfort can be treated and your treatment can be modified if needed.

When to Call Your Health Care Provider

You should call your health care provider if you notice any of the following symptoms:

- numbness or tingling in your hands or feet
- discomfort in your hands or feet like a feeling of “pins and needles” or burning
- trouble buttoning your buttons, closing zippers, or placing keys in keyholes
- difficulty picking up objects
- inability to feel hot and cold
- motor weakness, heaviness in arms and legs (May notice difficulty lifting feet.)
- uncoordinated walk (gait); tendency to lean or fall to one side when standing
- changes in speech or slurring words
- hoarseness
- muscles drooping on one side of face
- vision changes, such as double vision
- hearing changes: hearing loss, ringing or buzzing in ears
- constipation, colicky abdominal pain
- inability to urinate or impotence.

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Treatment

Treatment often includes medicine, exercise or other therapies, such as acupuncture, massage or relaxation techniques.

Many medicines can “calm down” the nervous system but some work better than others. For instance, your symptoms may not respond well to anti-inflammatory medicine such as ibuprofen and aspirin.

You may also have symptoms that are best treated by a combination of medicines.

It may take a while for your health care provider to find the right medicine for you. Follow their instructions for medicine, exercise, diet and other therapies.

Medicines Used to Treat Neuropathy

Medicines prescribed for other symptoms may also reduce the symptoms of neuropathy:

- Anticonvulsants are used to treat seizures. Common brands prescribed to treat neuropathy are:
 - gabapentin (Neurontin®)
 - pregabalin (Lyrica®)
 - carbamazepine (Tegretol®)
 - topiramate (Topamax®)
 - lamotrigine (Lamictal®)
 - levetiracetam (Keppra®).
- Antidepressants are used to treat depression. Common brands prescribed to treat neuropathy are:
 - duloxetine (Cymbalta®)
 - venlafaxine (Effexor®)
 - amitriptyline (Elavil®)
 - nortriptyline (Pamelor®)
 - imipramine (Tofranil®)
 - doxepin (Adapin®, Sinequan®)
 - bupropion (Wellbutrin XL®).
- Other medicines:
 - Lidoderm® patches
 - methadone
 - ketamine.

Talk with your health care provider if your medicine does not work. They can help you safely stop and start a different medicine.