Peripheral neuropathy is a nerve problem that impacts your sensory and motor nerves. If your sensory nerves are affected, you may have numbness, tingling, or burning sensations in your arms or legs. If your motor nerves are affected, you may have muscle weakness, cramping, or twitching.

Peripheral neuropathy usually begins in the hands or feet and gets worse over time. When you have peripheral neuropathy, you have a greater chance of injuring yourself. This handout explains what causes peripheral neuropathy, when to contact us, and what you can do at home.

What causes peripheral neuropathy?

- Some chemotherapy medications
- Other cancer treatments, like surgery or radiation
- Tumors pressing on nerves
- Infections that affect the nerves
- Spinal cord injuries
- Diabetes
- Alcohol abuse
- Shingles
- Low vitamin B1 (thiamine), B6 (pyridoxine) and B12 (cyanocobalamin) levels
- Some autoimmune disorders
- HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) infection
- Poor circulation (peripheral vascular disease)
When to contact us

Call **911 now** if you experience:

- Your legs won’t move

Call your care team if you experience:

- A fall
- Sensation symptoms that are getting worse (pain, numbness, burning, tingling, etc)
- You can’t control your muscles; for instance muscle twitching, cramping, foot drop (can’t lift the front part of your foot), or muscle atrophy
- Abnormal blood pressure or symptoms of abnormal blood pressure, such as blurred vision and dizziness
- Digestive problems such as nausea

What you can do at home

- Always wear shoes and slippers that cover your whole foot when walking, even when at home.
- Wear clothing to protect your skin. Wear gloves when you clean, work outside or do repairs. Keep your hands and feet warm and well covered in cold weather. For example, consider keeping a pair of gloves in your car. Avoid extreme temperatures.
- Be careful when using hot, cold, sharp or potentially harmful objects, like scissors and knives. Use them only when you can give your full attention to the task.
- Check your feet daily, looking carefully at your toes and the bottom of your feet for any injuries or open sores.
- Protect yourself from heat injuries. Use hot pads when handling hot dishes, racks, or pans. Set hot water heaters between 105° to 120°F to reduce the risk of burning while bathing or washing your hands.
- Keep fingernails short to avoid tearing.
- Keep hands moisturized to prevent your skin from cracking from dryness.
- Clear walkways, including stairwells, of objects that you could trip over such as small rugs, toys, or clutter.
- Be careful of slippery, wet floors in the bathroom or kitchen areas of your home.
What you can do at home, continued

- Be sure that you have ways to support yourself if you have problems with stumbling while walking. Hand rails in hallways and bathrooms may help you keep your balance. A walker or cane can give you extra support.

- Use night lights or flashlights when getting up in the dark.

- Ask your care team for the Slips, Trips and Falls brochure to learn what you can do at home to prevent falls.

- Walk and stretch your arms and legs to help keep your muscles flexible.

- Gentle foot and hand massages can help relieve stiffness and discomfort.

- If you are not able to exercise, have fallen, or need assistance with walking, please talk to your care team about a referral to physical therapy.

Reference: cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/peripheral-neuropathy/managing-peripheral-neuropathy.html