



Neuropathy

Numbness and tingling in upper and lower extremities can be common with certain medications including certain chemotherapies and targeted agents. Nerves that serve the bowel, face, back or chest can also be involved. For most patients, symptoms will be mild and intermittent. Other patients will have more significant symptoms that are constant or painful. Most of the time this is reversible but it can take many months to years to resolve. On

rare occasions, some patients will have permanent symptoms.

Treatment induced neuropathy often begins in the fingertips or toes and starts very gradually. It can affect just one finger/toe or it can grow to affect hands/feet and arms/legs.

Conditions that increase the risk of treatment related neuropathy are:

-Diabetes

-Alcoholism

-Severe Malnutrition

-Previous chemotherapy

Always inform your nurse or doctor if you have any of these symptoms:

- Numbness, tingling (feeling of pins and needles) in hands or feet
- Burning in hands or feet
- Numbness around the mouth
- Constipation
- Decrease in or loss of sense of touch
- Loss of positional sense (knowing where a body part is without looking)
- Pain in hands or feet
- Weakness or cramping in legs
- Pain or spasm when exposed to cold air or objects (with Oxaliplatin)
- Difficulty picking things up or buttoning clothes

You may be able to prevent or minimize these symptoms by:

- applying ice/cold packs to your hands and feet during IV infusion of the chemotherapy/targeted agent. (This is controversial with Oxaliplatin)
- Wear thick socks and soft soled shoes
- Wear warm clothing in cold weather. Protect hands and feet from extreme cold
- Use potholders when cooking
- Use gloves when washing dishes or gardening
- Inspect skin for cuts, abrasions or burns daily, especially arms, legs, toes and fingers.
- Eat foods high in fiber like fruits (pears, prunes), cereals or vegetables.
- Drink 2-3 liters (64 ounces) of non-alcoholic fluids (waters, juices) each day unless told otherwise by your doctor.
- Exercise 20-30 minutes as many days a week as tolerated, even if just to go for a walk.

Avoid:

- Walking barefoot
- Ensure water is not too hot before touching or getting in the bath

To manage symptoms:

- Refer to Constipation hand out for prevention and management of constipation.
- You may require prescription medications such as Gabapentin or Duloxetine which may help reduce the discomfort associated with neuropathy.
- There is no treatment for sensation changes.
- Acupuncture/Acupressure has limited data to support it but may be of use.