

Nervous System Changes: What they are and Ways to Manage

What they are and why they happen

Some cancer treatments can harm your nervous system. Most often, they can affect the peripheral nerves, which are all of the nerves in the body except for your spinal cord and brain. This is known as **peripheral neuropathy**. This damage can cause pain and make it hard to perform daily functions such as walking or using your hands. These symptoms may resolve over time, or they may last the rest of your life.

Problems may include:

- Tingling, burning, lack of strength, in your hands or feet
- Numbness or loss of feeling in hands or feet. Your ability to sense temperature such as hot/cold or pressure/touch may be lessened or gone.
- “Pins and needles” feeling in hands or feet
- Pain when walking
- Being clumsy or losing your balance
- Feeling colder than normal
- Not able to feel pain from things like a sore on your foot or a cut on your hand
- Sweating too much or too little
- Weak, sore, tired or achy muscles
- Trouble picking things up or buttoning your clothes
- Shaking or trembling
- Hearing loss
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Stomach pain, constipation, diarrhea or heartburn
- Confusion and memory problems
- Dizziness
- Depression or feeling down
- Less common – low blood pressure or low heart rate

What you can do



- **Call your doctor's office if you are have any of the problems listed on page 1.** Ask them about ways to help manage these problems.
- **Call your doctor's office if you have any signs of an infected wound, such as fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, chills, swelling, skin redness or red streaks on skin, warmth, drainage and/or pain.**
- **Avoid falling.**
 - Walk slowly and keep pathways clear by removing cords, rugs, and other objects.
 - Set up hand rails throughout house, especially in the bathroom, hallways, and stairs.
 - Use a night light or flash light when walking at night or darkened areas.
 - Steady yourself while walking with an assistive device such as a cane or walker.
- **Take breaks when needed.** Give yourself extra time to do things.
- **Protect your feet.** Always wear sneakers, tennis shoes or other footwear with rubber soles. Check your feet daily for any cuts, bruises or burns you may not have felt.
- **Protect your hands.** Wear gloves when working in the garden, cooking or washing dishes. Also wear gloves while handling knives, scissors and other sharp or unsafe object. Check your hands daily for any cuts/bruises/burns you may not have felt.
- **Monitor temperatures closely.** Be extra careful not to burn yourself while cooking. Make sure your bath water is not too hot so that you don't get burned.
- **Talk with your doctor about medicines that may help such as steroids, numbing cream, or pain medicine.**

This info is a general resource. It is not meant to replace your doctor's advice. Ask your doctor or health care team any questions. Always follow their instructions.