



CANCER
INFAMILY
— build knowledge



MUSCLES AND NERVES

This booklet discusses the muscular and neurological problems that can appear as result of chemotherapy or other cancer treatment. Ask your doctor if your treatment(s) puts you at risk of developing them.

PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLETS ARE NOT MEANT TO REPLACE THE INFORMATION, ADVICE AND SUPPORT PROVIDED BY YOUR DOCTOR.

Muscles and nerves problems

Some of the chemicals used in chemotherapy can affect the peripheral nerves (those that are not part of the brain and spinal cord). This side effect is called peripheral neuropathy.

This neuropathy is temporary, disappearing with the end of treatment. However, a few patients can keep some light symptoms for longer.

There are two types of peripheral nerves: sensory and motor. Sensory nerves are responsible for carrying information, such as sensations of heat, cold and pain, from the outside world to the brain and spinal cord. Motor nerves carry the impulses from the brain and spinal cord to control the muscles.

Symptoms of neuropathy will depend on which nerves are damaged.

Sensory nerves are most commonly affected causing numbness, tingling, stinging and cold or burning sensations in the feet or fingers/hands.

Muscles affected by neuropathy will feel weakened or sore.

Problems in the nerves and muscles are frustrating, but tend to not be serious if detected quickly. However, they can become quite painful or even lead to irreversible damage if left untreated. For this reason, it is crucial that you tell the doctor about any neurologic or muscular symptoms as soon as possible. Your doctor might recommend stopping chemotherapy for some time, or alternatively, give you something to relieve the symptoms.

Symptoms typical of muscles and nerves problems:

- × Uncomfortable tingling in the fingers.
 - × Stomach pain.
 - × Difficulty in holding a pen or buttoning clothes.
 - × Constipation.
 - × Problems walking.
 - × Pain in the jaw.
 - × Loss of balance.
 - × Loss of hearing.
 - × Muscle weakness.
 - × Vision abnormalities.
 - × Hypersensitivity to pressure or temperature.
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How to deal with muscles and/or nerves problems:

Preventing problems

- ✘ If your fingers are numb, be extra careful when handling sharp, hot or otherwise dangerous objects.
- ✘ Use loose shoes that cover the top of the foot.
- ✘ Use warm gloves and socks if it is cold.
- ✘ Choose accessories that you can use without help, such as coats with zippers.
- ✘ If your balance is affected, move carefully, use the railing in the stairs, secure any loose carpet ends, and always have a non-slip rug in the tub or shower.
- ✘ Always have good lighting throughout the house to avoid falls.
- ✘ Ask your doctor or nurse if it is safe to drive with your symptoms.



Exercise

- ✘ Walking is a good exercise while also keeping your muscles flexible.
- ✘ Stretching your back or calves also helps keeping your muscles flexible.
- ✘ If you use a gym, tell them that you have peripheral neuropathy. Ask for guidance on safe exercises to maintain muscle tone.



Hand-Foot Syndrome

Some types of chemotherapy may cause skin redness, changes in sensitivity and pain in the palm of the hands and the soles of the feet. Urea-rich creams, and the ingestion of vitamin B12 supplements usually help. Talk to your doctor about this.



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