

After Treatment: Neuropathy



“I’ve finished my cancer treatment, but I still feel tingling and numbness in my hands and feet. Will this be permanent?”

Lila, 68, recovering from cancer

Why might I experience neuropathy after treatment ends?

Some types of cancer and their treatments can cause nerve damage. This damage is referred to as peripheral neuropathy or simply as neuropathy. Neuropathy can lead to numbness and tingling (pins and needles) in the body, especially in the fingers and toes. This occurs when there is damage to the nerves between the spine, and in the hands and feet.

Other signs of neuropathy include:

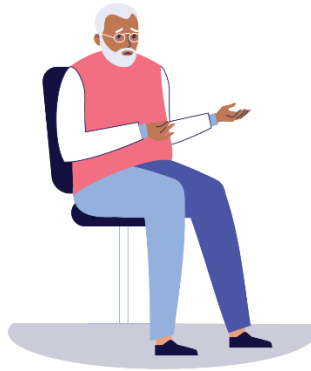
- Numbness or decreased ability to feel in your hands or feet.
- Feelings of burning, pinching, or electric shocks.
- An unpleasant feeling when touching something or when being touched.
- The sense that you cannot feel the floor under your feet. You also might not feel the shape of something you are holding in your hands.
- Becoming either more or less sensitive to heat and cold.
- Trouble with balance, especially in the dark.
- Muscle weakness and cramps.
- Constipation (having too few bowel movements) or bloating (your stomach feeling full and tight)
- Dizziness, especially when getting up from a bed or chair.
- Blurred vision.
- Trouble hearing.
- Difficulty chewing.
- Changes in sweating.
- Sexual difficulties.

For more information on constipation, see [Constipation](#).

For more information on sexual difficulties, see [Sexual Matters](#).

For more information on symptoms that may concern you and are not listed, see [Other symptoms](#).

Some complications of cancer treatment may cause neuropathy. Other health conditions along with cancer can also worsen the nerve damage. These conditions include AIDS, alcoholism, carpal tunnel syndrome, diabetes, low thyroid hormone level, and rheumatoid arthritis.



How does it affect me?

Neuropathy can cause weakness in the limbs, problems with balance, and difficulty with fine muscle movements. This means you may have:

- Trouble walking.
- Problems balancing, making it more likely for you to trip or fall.
- Less sensitivity in your fingers, making it hard to button clothes, pull up zippers, or tie shoelaces.
- Reduced coordination and muscle strength, making it difficult to perform everyday tasks.

These changes may also affect how you do your job. For example:

- If your job requires you to climb a ladder, balance problems can make this dangerous.
- Lack of strength can make it difficult to work with tools or carry heavy objects.
- Changes in temperature can make it harder for you to work, for example, working outdoors in the summer or working in a hot kitchen setting or refrigerated areas.
- Decreased pain tolerance can make any kind of work more difficult.

Will it get better?

Every person is different. Your recovery time will depend on how well your nerves heal. That can vary based on several factors. The factors can include the cause of the damage and how extensive it was.

Neuropathy can be temporary. For some, symptoms may go away once you stop taking the medication causing your neuropathy. However, it can take months or even years before the symptoms go away. As your nerves heal, the symptoms may get worse for a few months before they get better. In some cases, the nerve damage may be permanent.

There are things you can do to help reduce the problems caused by damaged nerves. See section [“What can I do to help manage my neuropathy?”](#).



When should I get help for neuropathy?

Dealing with the symptoms of neuropathy is not easy. Talk to your healthcare team right away if you experience any of the following:

- New or worsening pain.
- Worsening numbness.
- Weakness.
- Muscle loss.
- Loss of feeling in a particular area of your body.
- Loss or weakness in your reflexes
- Burning sensation along the route of a nerve in your body.
- Tingling or a feeling of stinging or poking, especially if it is getting worse.
- Feelings of swelling or tightness that are getting worse.
- Problems with balance.
- Your medicine is not helping to relieve your symptoms.

For more information, see Chronic Pain.

If you experience pain with neuropathy, see these [Video Webinars](#).



What can I do to help manage my neuropathy?

There are a number of ways you can manage the symptoms of your neuropathy. They will vary depending on:

- Which symptoms you have.

- What parts of your body are affected.
- Other health conditions you have.
- The medicine you are taking.



Speak to your healthcare team

Your healthcare team is in the best position to help you. They can help to create a plan to manage your symptoms. For example, some medicines may make neuropathy worse. Your doctor can review your medicines and change them if necessary.

If you need help speaking to your healthcare team, see [Communicating with your healthcare team](#) for more information.

Your personal plan may include pain relieving medicines such as pills, creams or natural remedies.



Keep a symptom diary

A symptom diary is useful to keep track of your symptoms. Sharing information with your healthcare team helps them to understand your neuropathy. It also allows you to see the pattern of your symptoms. Some important details to keep track of include:

- Does your neuropathy affect you daily?
- How does your neuropathy affect you? Is it your hands, your feet, or your balance?
- What seems to make it worse?
- What seems to make it better?
- When do you experience your symptoms? Is your neuropathy worse at night or during the day?
- Does it affect your sleep?

For more information, see [Symptom Diary](#).



Medical Therapies

Other treatment options include medical therapies such as:

- Hand and foot massage.
- Physiotherapy to help to strengthen your muscles and improve your balance.
- Occupational therapy can help you find ways to complete everyday tasks independently, such as bathing and getting dressed.
- Podiatrist to provide foot care.

Self-help Tips

In addition to what your healthcare team recommends, you can also take certain steps yourself. Here are some examples.



Nutrition

- **Avoid alcohol.** Avoid drinking large amounts of alcohol. It can affect your balance and can change how your hands and feet feel.

- **Check before taking new supplements.** Always check with your healthcare team before starting any new supplement or natural health product.
- **Ensure regular bowel movements.** Make sure you have regular bowel movements. If you get constipated, tell your healthcare team right away.
- **See which type of diet is good for you.** Depending on what your body needs, you could choose from a variety of diets. There are diets rich in certain nutrients, anti-inflammatory diets and blood sugar control diets.
- **Avoid food that could worsen Neuropathy.** If you have a previous health condition such as celiac disease or diabetes, this may worsen your neuropathy. Avoid added sugars and artificial flavours as they have few nutrients. Saturated fats, which are found in some meats and dairy products can cause inflammation.



Physical Activity

- **Walking and stretching helps.** Walking will help keep your muscles strong while stretching will improve your flexibility.
- **Ask if you need a physiotherapist.** Ask your healthcare team if you should consult a certified practitioner such as a physiotherapist, or kinesiologist. These professionals are qualified to help with your mobility and activity after treatment. Some may even be experienced working with patients who have undergone treatment for cancer, and even had neuropathy.
- **Stop if unwell.** Always stop if you feel unwell or have pain.
- **Ensure others know.** If you exercise in a gym, make sure the staff are aware of your neuropathy.

For more information, see [Get Moving](#).



Stay Safe

- **Take special care of your hands and feet.**
- **Avoid using heat.** Avoid using a heating pad on your affected areas, such as your feet. You could get a burn without realizing it.
- **Wear warm clothing in cold weather.** Wear warm gloves and shoes or boots when outside in cold weather.
- **Wear protective gloves for daily activities.** Wear gloves when washing dishes and gardening.
- **Choose good support shoes.** Select shoes that provide protection and good support. Make sure they are the correct size and are not too tight or loose.
- **Get professional nail care.** Have your fingernails and toenails cared for by a professional. Foot care nurses or foot care clinics can provide these services.
- **Check your skin daily.** Check your skin daily for cuts, bruises, and signs of infection.
- **Check water temperature not using your hands or feet.** Check the water temperature with your elbow or thermometer before getting into the tub or shower.



Balance problems:

- **Be careful when active.** Balance problems can increase the risk of injuring yourself. Be especially careful when being active.
- **Use a walker or cane.** If you have trouble with balance, use a walker or cane.
- **Keep your home tidy.** Keep your home free of clutter to reduce your risk of tripping or falling.

- **Tape down loose rugs.** If you have loose rugs, tape down the edges using carpet tape, or get rid of them altogether.
- **Consider household aids.** You may benefit from a raised toilet seat or shower safety bar. These aids can give you support to hold onto. If you have difficulty with standing, you can select from a variety of bath stools to suit your needs.
- **Use non-skid mats.** Use non-skid mats or strips in your bathtub or shower.
- **Find tools to get dressed easier.** Look for zipper pulls, shoehorns, and other helpful tools to make getting dressed easier.
- **Make sure your home has good lighting.** Always turn the light on before entering a room.
- **Consider putting nightlights in the hallways and bathroom.**



Daily activities:

- **Use lightweight dishes, cutlery, and cooking tools.**
- **Choose non-breakable glasses, cups, and dishes when possible.**
- **Ask your employer to take on less dangerous tasks.** Your work may put you in danger from using ladders or tools, handling sharp objects or by working in extreme temperatures. Ask your employer if you could take on different tasks. Find out if other accommodations can be made to make your workplace safer. For more information on accommodations, see the factsheet "[Back to Work](#)".
- **Be safe when driving.** If you drive, make sure you can feel the steering wheel in your hands. Make sure you can also feel the gas and brake pedals below your feet.



Coping with Emotions

Having cancer and finishing treatment can be difficult enough to cope with. Added problems caused by neuropathy may also affect you emotionally. Here are some suggestions to help you cope.

- **Seek support from other people living with cancer.** Sharing stories with people who are having similar experiences can bring comfort. You might learn new ways to cope. It can also help you gain the strength needed to face challenges. Ask your healthcare team to guide you to a local support group. For more information on support groups for your Neuropathy, see [CancerConnection.ca – Neuropathy](#).
- **Practice relaxation techniques.** Relaxation is not always easy to achieve, but there are things that you can try. Some examples include yoga, meditation, breathing exercises, muscle relaxation, and guided imagery. For more information, see [Relaxation Strategies](#).
- **Look for activities that you enjoy and find fun to do.** Some examples are reading a good book, listening to music, going for a walk, or engaging in a hobby. Make healthy lifestyle choices. Set realistic goals for yourself, and don't try to conquer the world.
- **Take care of yourself.** A healthy diet and physical activity can help you feel physically and emotionally better. For more information, see [Looking after yourself](#).

Important information about cannabis

Some patients do use cannabis to reduce pain, help with relaxation, or as a sleeping aid. However, the research is still unclear about the use of cannabis to manage symptoms. It is important to talk to your doctor before trying cannabis. For more information on what cancer patients should know about cannabis, go to: www.bccancer.ca/health-info/coping-with-cancer/medical-cannabis.

Available Services

Resources	General information	Services offered pour [Neuropathy]
The Quebec Cancer Foundation	<p>The Quebec Cancer Foundation supports people with cancer and their loved ones throughout Quebec, through services suited to their needs and daily concerns.</p> <p>Contact 1 (800) 363-0063 infocancer@fqc.qc.ca</p>	<p>Services offered: Several services and activities offered by the Quebec Cancer Foundation can be useful to help you manage your neuropathy including support and information hotlines; psychological support; physical wellness programs such as kinesiology, massage therapy, and yoga.</p> <p>The foundation also has a document lending service. Their materials (books, web resources, online articles, webcasts) cover a wide range of topics related to cancer. It is free to borrow, and materials are sent by mail or email anywhere in Quebec.</p>


Resource	General Information	Services offered
The Quebec Breast Cancer Foundation	<p>The mission of the Quebec Breast Cancer foundation is to promote the wellbeing of people who have been affected by cancer and their families through research and innovation, support, and awareness.</p> <p>They offer many services including information and support hotlines, as well as resources adapted to the needs of people affected by cancer and their families.</p>	<p>Free virtual clinic: a service of first aid offered to people affected by breast cancer. We aim to help manage the secondary effects that arise after treatment and those that persist long term. The clinic is free, easy to use and accessible 24/7.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better monitoring and screening • Management of secondary effects that arise after treatment and those that stay

	<p>For more information, please contact:</p> <p>1-855-561-ROSE soutien@rubanrose.org</p>	<p>permanent at long-term</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion in health and healthy life habits • Coordination of care between specialists and generalists
Resource	General information	Offered Services
Cancer Canadian Society (National)	<p>They offer support for people with cancer and their family, friends and caregivers.</p> <p>Their information specialists are there to answer your questions and offer up-to-date, reliable information on topics that include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cancer treatment and side effects • clinical trials • coping with cancer • emotional support services • prevention • help in the community • complementary therapies 	<p>The Cancer Information helpline is available Monday to Friday in English and French from 8am to 6pm. For other languages, they can access an interpreter service.</p> <p>Website and live-chat: Talk to an information specialist Canadian Cancer Society</p> <p>(Toll free) number: 1-888-939-3333</p> <p>Contact form: Cancer information and support Canadian Cancer Society</p> <p>You can also access the CCS database below to find support services in your area:</p>

Service Locator

Below is a list of organizations that can help identify local support services for you and those that support you. The quality of the services has not been verified by e-IMPAQc. Before using these services, verify with your healthcare practitioner.

Organization	Services & Search	Contact
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Find local support services		
 <p>Search the Canadian Cancer Society's database of cancer support services in your area. Need help? Call 1-888-939-3333 or email CCS at info@cancer.ca.</p> <p>What are you looking for? <input type="text" value="e.g. home care"/> City or postal code <input type="text" value="e.g. M1M 2M3"/> <input type="button" value="Search"/></p>		
Regroupement des Organisations Communautaires en Oncologie (Provincial – Quebec) (French)	The Regroupement des Organisations Communautaires en Oncologie (ROCO) offers a service locator resource specific to the province of Quebec. It lists support resources available by region.	info@rocoqc.ca 514-506-3503
Quebec Cancer Foundation (Provincial – Quebec)	The Quebec Cancer Foundation offers a resources directory of community, association and public resources by region or postal code.	INFO-CANCER: 1 800 363-0063 Monday to Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM EST infocancer@fqc.qc.ca

Acknowledgement of Sources

The content of this document has been adapted from the following sources:

- Memorial Sloan Cancer Center, Answers to 8 FAQ About Chemotherapy-Induced Peripheral Neuropathy (CIPN)
- Canadian Cancer Society. Peripheral Nerve Damage (peripheral neuropathy)
- BC Cancer. Peripheral Neuropathy (nerve damage)
- Looking Forward Foundation. Peripheral Neuropathy. What Is It?
- McGill BC Cancer. Cancer and Work
- Cancer Care. Coping with Nerve Damage (Neuropathy)
- Cancer Care. Understanding Peripheral Neuropathy
- Cancer Support Community. Coping with Side Effects
- Compass Oncology. Cognitive Changes and Neuropathy after Cancer Treatment
- MD Anderson Cancer Center. Peripheral Neuropathy in Cancer Patients
- Livestrong. Neuropathy

Healthcare professional endorsement

The content of this document has been reviewed and approved by a team of healthcare professionals and clinical experts.

Disclaimer

Please note that this fact sheet is not intended as a substitute for consultation with a healthcare professional. ***Rather, it was designed to complement interventions by your treating team.*** If you have questions about your health, or any medical issue, you should contact a healthcare professional right away. You should not delay seeking medical advice, or disregard professional medical advice, because of information in this fact sheet. Before beginning any health treatment, always consult your doctor. All care has been taken to ensure that the information contained in this document is accurate at the time of publication. e-IMPAQc is not responsible for any injury or damage to persons or property arising out of, or related to, any use of the fact sheet, or because of any errors or omissions.

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