

- Tape pipe insulation around tools to increase the size of handles (e.g., a fork);
- Use liquid soap or gels instead of a bar;
- Use a rubber thimble or a pencil eraser to turn the pages of your book;
- Choose long necklaces that do not require clasps;
- Use a rubber glove or pad to help you grip and open jars better;
- Attach the rough part of Velcro™ to an object (e.g., a glass or bottle) so that you can feel the object more easily;
- Button your shirt before putting it on;
- Attach a paper clip or a piece of string to your zipper.



### How can I get more information or services?

- Your doctor or nurse can provide you with more information about peripheral neuropathy;
- Physiotherapists can develop an exercise program suited to you. Ask your family doctor for a referral;
- Occupational therapists can help you with your daily activities at home and at work. Ask your family doctor for a referral;
- A podiatrist (foot doctor) can evaluate your feet and provide care. Ask your family doctor for a referral;
- Your local Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) may be able to offer you additional services. You do not need a referral to call your CCAC;
- The Neuropathy Association can be reached at 1-800-247-6968 or [www.neuropathy.org](http://www.neuropathy.org) (checked June 18, 2008).

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McGill University Health Centre.*



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## Patient Information Peripheral Neuropathy



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## What is peripheral neuropathy?

Peripheral neuropathy is the term used to describe an injury, an inflammation (swelling) or a breakdown of the peripheral nerves. Peripheral nerves are found throughout the body and they connect to the spinal cord and brain (central nervous system). The brain talks to the body through the peripheral nerves. Damage to the nerves can cause:

- Loss of strength;
- Loss of feeling;
- Pain.

Most times peripheral neuropathy happens in the hands and feet.

## What causes peripheral neuropathy?

Peripheral neuropathy can be caused by one or more of these:



- Certain chemotherapies;
- Previous neuropathies;
- Diabetes;
- The lack of vitamins (Check with your physician before using a supplement);
- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV);
- Hypothyroid disease (under active thyroid);
- Alcohol abuse.

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## What does peripheral neuropathy feel like?

Peripheral neuropathy usually causes feelings of numbness, tingling and burning in the fingers or toes. Some people feel pain.



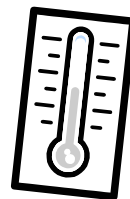
The symptoms of peripheral neuropathy may start 24 hours after your first treatment. They may increase as more chemotherapy treatments are given and may last for six months after your last treatment. The symptoms of peripheral neuropathy should slowly get better after your last treatment, however, for some people these feelings will never go away.

Watch for any signs of peripheral neuropathy. If you notice any changes, please advise your doctor or your nurse.

## How can injuries and infections be prevented?

It is important for you to do these safety measures to reduce your risk of injuries and infections:

- Check the temperature of the bath or sink water by using your forearm, elbow or a thermometer;
- Wear gloves when washing the dishes or working in the garden;



- Use pot holders, oven mitts and heat resistant tools, such as ladles, when cooking;
- Be careful using sharp objects when cutting food or trimming plants;
- Check your feet for cuts, blisters and/or scratches;
- Wear comfortable shoes with rubber soles at all times. Do not walk barefoot;
- Wear socks and gloves when the weather is cold;
- Use a moisturizing cream with vitamin E.



## How do I prevent falls?

- Use a night light;
- Make sure carpets are secured and not frayed;
- Use non-slip bath mats in the bath or shower.

## Is it safe for me to drive?

If you have peripheral neuropathy, talk to your doctor or nurse to see if it is safe for you to drive a car.

## What can make everyday activities easier?

The following tips may help to make your daily activities easier:

- Use large diameter tools like a thick pen or pencil;