

HOW TO MANAGE YOUR NEUROPATHY



Table of Contents

What is Neuropathy?	03
Symptoms of Neuropathy	04
Risk Factors of Neuropathy	05
Managing Neuropathy	06
Exercises for Neuropathy*	08

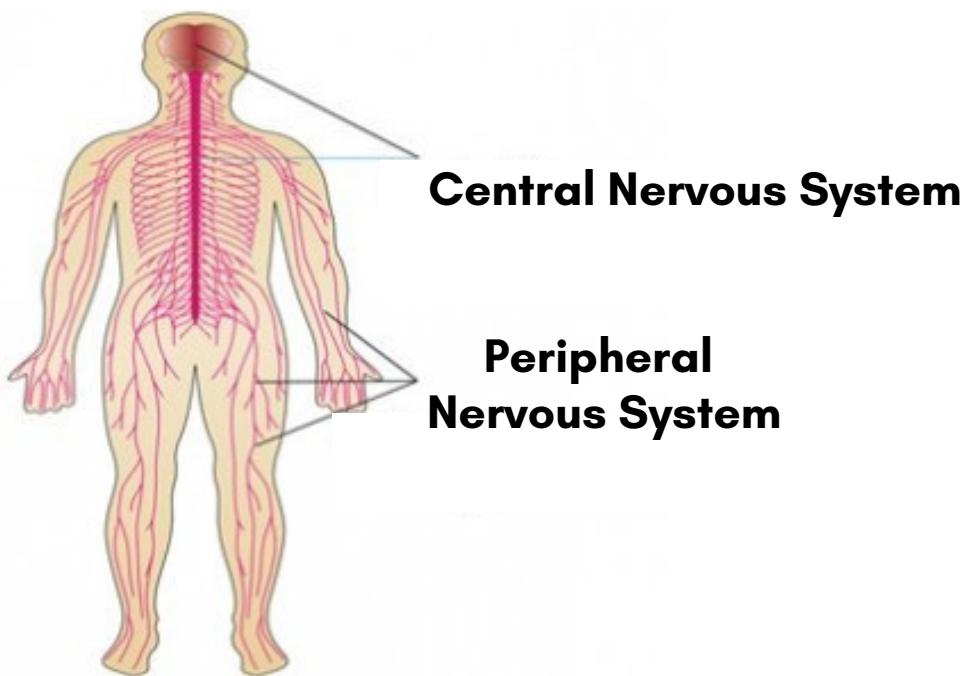
What is Neuropathy?

Neuropathy is damage to your nerve(s) resulting in numbness and tingling in the affected area(s).

There are many causes of peripheral neuropathy, for example: Diabetes, trauma and exposure to toxins. For cancer survivors, neuropathy is likely caused by the side effects of cancer treatment. Doctors name this condition as Chemo-Induced Peripheral Neuropathy (CIPN).

Function of Peripheral Nerves

Your peripheral nerves are the distant nerves outside the brain and spinal cord. They are important as they carry sensations and control the movements and coordination of your arms and legs.



How To Manage Neuropathy

Symptoms of Neuropathy

The symptoms tend to vary from patient to patient.

Some symptoms include:

- Feeling of numbness, tingling or "pins and needles" in your hands and feet
- Sudden, poking discomfort in your hands or feet
- Burning or warm sensation
- Unable to feel the ground beneath your feet when walking
- Being more or less sensitive to heat and cold temperatures
- General weakness, e.g. unable to open a jar or bottle, unable to climb stairs or getting up from the chair
- Cramps in your hands and feet
- Loss of balance, or unable to walk well

The above symptoms may affect your ability in doing activities such as picking up an object, buttoning your clothes, picking up coins, holding a pen, manipulating small objects, typing and/or taking transport.



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Risk factors of Developing Neuropathy after Cancer Treatment

The risk of neuropathy is largely dependent on the type of treatment used to treat the cancer. These factors include:

- Type and amount of chemotherapy (dosage and frequency)
- Pre-existing conditions such as diabetes, vitamin deficiencies or peripheral vascular disease
- Consuming excessive alcohol

Onset & Duration of Neuropathy Symptoms

Neuropathy symptoms may happen any time after treatment, though they typically appear in the beginning of your cancer treatment, between the first and third cycles. Research shows that the severity tends to peak in the third month of treatment. Symptoms often improve over time. However for some people, the symptoms may persist and continue to worsen after treatment has ended.

Medications for Neuropathy

There are medications that may relieve your neuropathic pain, for e.g. Duloxetine. You may speak to your doctor to find out about medications for managing neuropathy symptoms.



Managing Neuropathy

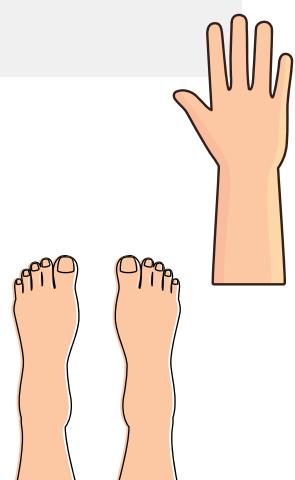
Be careful when you perform your daily activities

- Wear oven mitts when handling hot foods to avoid burns. Test the temperature of water with your elbow to make sure the water is not too hot during showering.
- Be careful when handling sharp objects (for example, cutting food items with a knife). Use scissors if possible.
- Be careful when carrying hot objects such as a bowl of hot soup.
- Give yourself extra time to do things; do not rush. Ask friends or family for help with tasks you find hard to do.
- If the numbness is affecting your balance, try to sit down to do activities, such as wearing your shoes and washing your feet.



Keep your skin healthy

- Check your skin for any cuts or abrasions regularly.
- Moisturise your hands and feet to reduce dry and cracked skin.
- Keep your finger webs and in between toes dry.
- Wear non-slip socks or shoes after you have applied moisturiser for your feet, to prevent falls.



Managing Neuropathy

Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS)

Your therapist may advise the use of TENS for reducing your neuropathy symptoms. TENS, in combination with exercises, may provide some relief and benefits. TENS is generally well tolerated and safe, except for patients with a history of seizures or who have a pacemaker. Your therapist may supervise your TENS application, and advise on appropriate TENS settings, duration and frequency of use, and monitor for any adverse effects.



Relaxation Strategies

For some people, the experience of neuropathy symptoms can trigger anxiety or panic attacks. You can consider adopting relaxation strategies such as mindfulness, guided imagery and deep breathing exercises to help reduce your anxiety or stress. You may learn more about these strategies from your occupational therapist.



How To Manage Neuropathy

Exercises for Neuropathy

Evidence has shown that exercises can help with neuropathy symptoms such as reducing pain and improving your physical function. These exercises include:

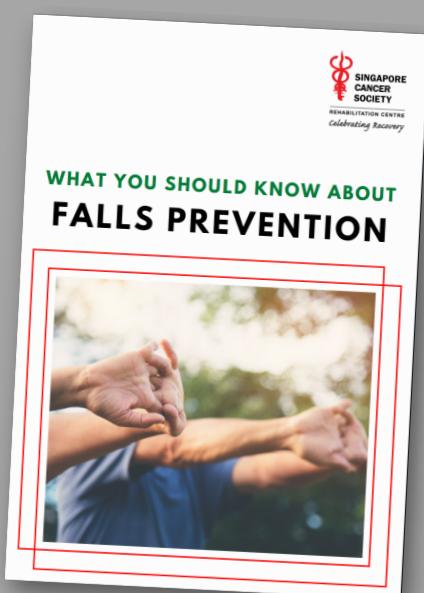
- Aerobic
- Resistance
- Balance

If your neuropathy symptoms are mild, you may engage in general strengthening and aerobic exercises. These exercises are meant to boost oxygen and blood flow to your muscles and peripheral nerves.

Note:

If you are at a risk of falls, refer to the brochure on "**What You Should Know About Fall Prevention**".

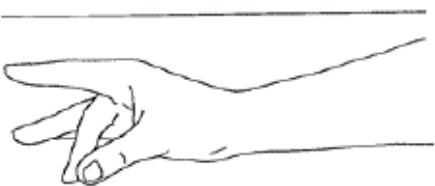
Your therapist will also guide you on how to perform **stretching, strengthening and balance exercises** safely.



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Exercises for Neuropathy

Finger Taps



Bring your thumb together with the straight index finger, then middle finger, ring finger and little finger. You may do this with both hands at the same time.

Repeat 10 times for 2 - 3 sets

.....

Squeezing Hands



Make a fist, making sure each joint bends as much as possible. Then spread fingers wide apart. You may do this with both hands at the same time.

Repeat 10 times for 2 - 3 sets

.....

Calf Stretch



Sit on floor with towel placed around foot and toes as shown. Pull top of foot and toes toward your body so that you feel a stretch at the back of your calf.

Hold for 15 - 30 seconds

Repeat 3 - 5 times

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Exercises for Neuropathy

Aerobic Exercises*

3 to 5 times a week
Aim for 150 minutes
per week

Moderate intensity aerobic training three times per week for a period of at least 12 weeks.

E.g. Walking, Cycling, Jogging, Swimming, Zumba



Resistance Exercises*

Twice a week

Resistance training at least 2 non consecutive days per week.

E.g. Exercise using resistance bands, own body weight or weights machine



NOTES



*Disclaimer: This brochure is designed for educational purposes only. You should not rely on this information as a substitute for, nor does it replace, professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. You are advised to consult a medical professional or healthcare provider if you are seeking medical advice, diagnoses or treatment. We shall not be liable for any damages, loss, injury or liability whatsoever suffered as a result of your reliance on the information contained in this brochure.

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