



TIPS

for Living With Peripheral Neuropathy

Peripheral neuropathy is a result of damage to the peripheral nerves. The condition often causes numbness, weakness, and pain, usually in the hands and feet. But peripheral neuropathy can affect other parts of the body as well. Following these tips may help reduce your symptoms.

Understand your risk factors. Risk factors for peripheral neuropathy can include a family history of neuropathy, diabetes mellitus, autoimmune disease, and infections such as Lyme disease, shingles, Epstein-Barr virus, hepatitis C, and HIV.

Know the nerve types that can be affected. Neuropathy can affect any of the three types of peripheral nerves—motor nerves, sensory nerves, and autonomic nerves. Some neuropathies affect all three types of nerves, while other neuropathies involve one or two sets of nerves.

Keep an eye on your feet. If you have peripheral neuropathy, it is imperative to regularly inspect your feet. Decreased sensation may eventually develop, and you might not otherwise notice an infection or injury.

Maintain a healthy diet. Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, lean protein, and whole grains to keep nerves healthy. Protect against vitamin B-12 deficiency by eating fish, eggs, meats, low-fat dairy foods, and fortified cereals. If you are a vegetarian or vegan, fortified cereals are an excellent source of vitamin B-12, but also talk to your doctor about B-12 supplements.

Avoid situations that can cause nerve damage. Certain factors can contribute to peripheral neuropathy. Factors that can cause nerve damage include cramped positions, repetitive motions, smoking, exposure to toxic chemicals, and alcohol abuse.

Control your blood levels. Peripheral neuropathy is common in people with diabetes, but the degree of neuropathy generally corresponds to the degree of blood sugar control. You can control peripheral neuropathy by keeping your blood sugar levels in check.

Exercise on a regular basis. Getting exercise is important for people with peripheral neuropathy. With your doctor's permission, aim for 30 minutes to one hour of exercise at least three times a week.

Opt for acupuncture. Acupuncture, which involves inserting thin needles into various points on the body, may be beneficial for people with peripheral neuropathy. You may need multiple sessions before you notice improvement.

This page is part of an ongoing series of practical tips for patients with neurologic disorders. If you have compiled clinically relevant tips that you wish to share, please contact the editor at info@neurologyreviews.com.

Tips for Patients are available for download at www.neurologyreviews.com.

