

# GMHC's Nutrition & Wellness Program

## PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY

### WHAT IS PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY?

Peripheral neuropathy is nerve damage usually involving the feet or hands, and sometimes legs and arms. Many of these nerves are involved with sensations such as pain, temperature and touch. Up to one-third of people with HIV may get some symptoms of peripheral neuropathy. It may be caused by HIV itself and/or medications.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Peripheral neuropathy may include the following symptoms:

- Numbness and tingling of fingers, hands, toes and feet
- Weakness in hands and feet
- Pain and/or burning sensation in hands and feet

A person with these symptoms should seek medical attention.

### CAN PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY BE PREVENTED?

There is no known prevention for peripheral neuropathy.

### WHAT DRUGS CAN CAUSE PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY?

Some drugs taken by people with HIV cause peripheral neuropathy. Not everyone taking these drugs will get peripheral neuropathy, but it's something to watch out for. Sometimes the risk of getting peripheral neuropathy increases when the drugs listed here are taken together:

- Some “d-drugs”, which are nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NNRTIs), including:
  - ddI (Didanosine, Videx)
  - ddC (Zalcitabine, Hivid)
  - d4T (Stavudine, Zerit)
- Indinavir (Crixivan)
- Dapsone
- Isoniazid (INH, Nydazid)
- Metronidazole (Flagyl)
- Vincristine (Oncovin)
- Thalidomide
- Ethambutol (Myambutol)

Other causes of peripheral neuropathy are:

- Drinking too much alcohol
- Taking too much vitamin B6

### NUTRIENTS AND PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY

- B vitamins have been found to help with symptoms of peripheral neuropathy, although high levels of vitamin B6 worsen symptoms. The ones that are helpful are vitamins B1, B12 and folate. **Take a multivitamin with vitamin E in it, and a B complex.** Make sure the B complex has folate in it.
- Other supplements that have shown some effect on neuropathy are **magnesium, alpha-lipoic acid (ALA), and gamma linolenic acid (GLA).**
- A diet high in the nutrient inositol may be helpful. Inositol is found in **cantaloupe, peanuts, grapefruit, and whole grains.**

## NON-DRUG WAYS TO REDUCE PAIN

- Walk around to get blood to the feet
- Avoid long periods of standing or walking
- Don't wear tight shoes and socks
- Keep feet uncovered in bed
- Soak feet in cool or ice water
- Acupuncture
- Deep tissue massage
- Biofeedback
- Maintain adequate nutrition
- Take safety measures to make up for loss of sensation
- Ask your doctor about special therapeutic shoes (which may be covered by Medicare or other insurance)

## RESOURCES:

Jack Miller Center for Peripheral Neuropathy,  
The University of Chicago:  
[www.millercenter.uchicago.edu](http://www.millercenter.uchicago.edu)

Project Inform: [www.projinf.org/fs/sneuro.html](http://www.projinf.org/fs/sneuro.html)

Toronto General Hospital, The  
Immunodeficiency Clinic:  
[www.tthivclinic.com](http://www.tthivclinic.com)

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