

Numbness and tingling in hands and feet

Some cancer treatments can damage the nerves that carry messages from the brain and spinal cord to the rest of the body. This causes numbness or tingling in the hands or feet ([peripheral neuropathy](#)).

Peripheral neuropathy is most often caused by certain anti-cancer drugs. But sometimes it can be caused by surgery, or by a tumour growing close to a nerve and pressing on it. Rarely, radiotherapy may damage nerves in the treated area.

Peripheral neuropathy usually affects the hands, feet and lower legs. The symptoms depend on which nerves are affected. Symptoms are usually mild to start with and gradually get worse.

It is important to tell your doctor if you notice any new symptoms that may be caused by treatment, or if your symptoms are getting worse. It is best to diagnose nerve damage as early as possible. If an anti-cancer drug is causing peripheral neuropathy, your doctor will assess how much your nerves are affected. This helps them decide whether to continue your treatment, reduce the dose or stop the drug.

Peripheral neuropathy usually improves slowly a few months after treatment has finished. If your hands or feet are affected, it is important to protect them as much as possible.

Tips for dealing with numbness or tingling in hands and feet

- Keep hands and feet warm by wearing gloves and socks in cold weather.
- Wear gloves when working with your hands – for example, when gardening or washing up.
- When cooking, wear oven gloves and take care to avoid burning your hands.
- Wear well-fitting shoes or boots.
- Avoid walking around barefoot and check your feet for any problems.
- Test the temperature of water with your elbow before getting into a bath or shower, or washing up.
- Keep hallways free of clutter. Remove loose rugs and other things that you could trip over.
- If your balance is affected, get advice from a physiotherapist about walking aids.
- If you are finding it hard to do daily tasks such as washing or dressing, you can ask to be referred to an occupational therapist. They can recommend the best aids and equipment for you.
- If you have symptoms for more than 6 months, and they cause problems with walking or daily activities, you could get financial help. You may be able to claim [Disability Living Allowance](#) if you are aged under 65. If you are over 65, you may be able to claim [Attendance Allowance](#).
- If you live in England, Scotland or Wales, you need to tell the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) that you have peripheral neuropathy. They will tell you whether you can still drive. If you live in Northern Ireland, contact the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA).
- If your symptoms cause changes to your lifestyle, it is natural to feel isolated and frustrated. Some people find it helpful to talk to friends or family, while some get help from others. Some people prefer to keep [their feelings](#) to themselves. There is no right or wrong way to cope, but help is there if you need it.

Macmillan Cancer Support resources

We have more information on our [website](#), including audiobooks. Or you can order our free booklets and leaflets on be.macmillan.org.uk such as:

- [Side effects of cancer treatment.](#)

We produce information in a [range of formats](#) and [languages](#). To order these, visit our website or call our support line.

Further Macmillan support

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Or visit macmillan.org.uk where you can [chat to us online](#).

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app. Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use.

Or if you want to share your experiences or ask questions, you can find others who understand on our [Online Community](#).

Other useful contact details

- British Red Cross – visit www.redcross.org.uk or call 0344 871 11 11
- Disabled Living Foundation – visit www.dlf.org.uk or call 0300 999 0004
- Scope – visit www.scope.org.uk
- DVLA – visit www.gov.uk/peripheral-neuropathy-and-driving

Notes and questions
