

## Peripheral neuropathy

This is a disorder of the Peripheral Nervous System in which nerves have become damaged, because of:

- Physical damage to nerves.
- Damage to the myelin sheath which surrounds some nerves.
- Loss of chemical receptors which help nerve signals to reach muscles.

## What are the symptoms?

These vary depending on which nerve(s) are affected. Peripheral neuropathy usually affects feet, but sometimes legs and hands too.

- Muscle weakness-you may find walking difficult or that you are dropping things easily.
- Foot deformity because the nerves that control muscles in your feet or legs have been affected.
- Unusual sensations such as tingling, 'electric shocks', burning or coldness.
- Loss of sensation-you cannot feel if you stand on a sharp pin when barefoot or you may burn yourself without realising.
- The foot may develop callus over areas that are taking extra pressure from ill-fitting footwear.
- You may not be aware of this if you do not feel pain.
- If untreated, this may result in ulceration and amputation.

## Footwear advice

- In some cases foot calluses or ulceration can be prevented by correctly fitting shoes.
- The shoe should be the correct length, width and depth for your foot. There should be 1 cm or 0.5 inches between the end of your longest toe and the end of your shoe.
- The upper should be soft with no hard seams or ridges and made from a natural fibre such as leather which allows moisture to evaporate.
- The shoe needs to hold your foot firmly in place with an adjustable fastening i.e. laces, straps with buckles or Velcro.
- The toe box should be round and deep to give the toes room to move.
- The heel should be less than 4 cm or 1.5 inches high, broad and stable.
- The shoe needs a firm heel counter that fits snugly around the back of your heel and helps to stabilise the foot when walking.
- Ideally the shoe will have a thick, lightweight, flexible sole of a non-slip material.

## What can I do?

- Check your feet daily for calluses or infections. If you are unable to reach your feet, place a mirror on the floor or get someone else to check your feet.

- Have your feet checked by a podiatrist or a nurse once a year.
- Test the bath or shower water before you put your feet in. You may not be able to tell if the water is too hot and you could burn or scald your feet. Use your elbow, not your hand.
- Do not use hot water bottles or electric blankets in bed. If you do, remove the hot water bottle or switch off the blanket before you get into bed.
- Do not sit close to an open or gas or electric fire.
- Check inside your shoes to ensure there are no rough seams or stones inside.
- Turn socks inside out so that the seam does not rub on your toes.
- Never walk about barefoot. Wear slippers or shoes at all times to protect
- Your feet from injury. If you are issued with special shoes, wear them daily.
- If you are able, file toe nails regularly with a long handled file to prevent long, pointed edges 'digging' into adjacent toes.
- If you develop any foot problems, contact a health professional immediately.

## What can be done?

- A health professional (nurse or podiatrist) will give you foot care and footwear advice and inform your G.P.
- Your G.P. may arrange for you to have blood tests for common causes such as diabetes, thyroid function and vitamin deficiencies.
- Your G.P. may refer you to a specialist for further tests or treatment.
- Some drugs may cause peripheral neuropathy. If you take regular prescribed medication, your G.P. will look at these. You may not be able to discontinue the medication, so please do not stop taking any drugs before talking to your G.P. Just because you are taking one of these drugs, it does not always mean that you will develop peripheral neuropathy.
- Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy may help to improve muscle strength and may help to prevent contractures of muscles.
- Insoles for your shoes may help improve your balance when walking. You would need to be referred to podiatry.
- Staying positive is important.
- There may be no obvious cause. It could be age related-a slowing down of the nervous system.

Organisations such as the Neuropathy Trust can help if you need further advice:

Tel: ☎ **01270 611828**  
P.O Box 26. Nantwich.  
Cheshire. CW5 5FP

**Please contact the podiatry department on ☎(01803) 217711**

--if you have any questions about the information in this leaflet  
--if you require further information

--if you require this leaflet in a different format

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For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.



**Torbay and South Devon**  
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## PATIENT INFORMATION

# Peripheral Neuropathy Non-diabetic

Department of Podiatry  
and Foot Health

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*Working with you, for you*