

CHEMOTHERAPY-INDUCED PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY (CIPN) POCKET GUIDE

FAST FACTS

- Chemotherapy most often affects the nerves that run to the legs, feet, hands, and arms.
- Nerve toxicity is the second most common cancer treatment-induced side effect.¹

WHAT IS PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY?

Peripheral neuropathy (PN) is numbness, tingling and pain in the hands, feet, fingers and toes. It is often caused by cancer treatment. You pronounce it “purr-IF-err-ull nurr-AW-path-ee.” It is also called CIPN for “chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy.”

WHAT CAUSES PN AND HOW CAN I AVOID IT?

If you need certain types of chemotherapy drugs to treat your cancer, PN is possible. These drugs include:

- The **platinum** drugs, such as cisplatin and oxaliplatin.
- The **taxanes**, such as paclitaxel and docetaxel.
- The **vinca** alkaloid drugs, such as vincristine, vinblastine, and vinorelbine.
- Drugs used to treat **myeloma**, such as bortezomib or thalidomide.

If you need one of these drugs and develop CIPN, talk with your doctor. They may lower the recommended dose or even stop treatment with that drug. Adjusting the dose or treatment schedule can reduce your neuropathy.²

Cool down to prevent CIPN

Cooling your hands and feet before and during your chemotherapy infusion may help prevent CIPN. You can use frozen socks and gloves or buy special cooling equipment. Talk with your doctor or other health care provider about cooling during treatment.³

Compression, or wearing gloves that are too small, may also help prevent CIPN. Talk to your doctor about this option.⁴

Acupuncture for CIPN

Several small studies have reported that acupuncture at specific points slowed down the progression or severity of CIPN when performed soon after chemotherapy.^{5,6} Ask your oncology team if acupuncture is available at your hospital or clinic. Acupuncture combined with reflexology, a specialized form of massage focused on the feet, also helped some patients in another small study.⁷

Other ways to manage PN

Several treatments can help with PN and the secondary effects of neuropathy, such as balance problems. Treatments to talk with your doctor about include:

- Physical and occupational therapy to help with movement, balance, and everyday challenges in fine motor function, such as gripping and lifting objects.
- Yoga or tai chi to help improve your balance.
- Mindfulness training to keep track of where you are walking, how you set your feet down, and more.

Managing pain from PN

PN is not just about numbness and tingling. You may also experience pain, which may be a burning sensation, or even pain from a gentle touch or other stimulus that you would not normally expect to hurt. You may also have difficulty walking normally or feeling your toes.

If you have painful CIPN, duloxetine (Cymbalta) is the only medication recommended so far by the American Society of Clinical Oncology.⁸ This is based on a modestly positive result in one randomized controlled trial. Other possible treatments include:

- Applying a combination of numbing cream and capsaicin cream.

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