Peripheral Neuropathy
As a Side Effect of Cancer Treatment

Peripheral neuropathy refers to a neurological dysfunction that occurs outside of the brain and spinal cord. It can be caused by cancer, treatments, or both.

Solid tumors can cause neuropathic symptoms and pain by pressing on local nerves.

Peripheral nerves that allow the hands and feet to sense heat, cold, and pain may be affected by certain chemotherapy medications. Ten to 100% of patients treated with chemotherapy may experience peripheral neuropathy. Some examples are:
- Taxol® (paclitaxel)
- Taxotere® (docetaxel)
- Oxalplatin
- Carboplatin
- Cisplatin
- Vincristine

Symptoms
Some people report numbness in the hands and feet, and describe it as “pins and needles.” Peripheral neuropathies in the feet may lead to poor balance and trouble walking. The person may appear to be walking on “tip-toes” because of nerve damage and pain. Other symptoms are listed below.

Tell your doctor or nurse right away if you have any of these symptoms:
- Numbness or tingling in the hands or feet
- Pain in the hands or feet
- Trouble with detailed movements such as buttoning a shirt
- Problems with balance or walking
- Injuries to the hands or feet
- Weakness
- Constipation

Preventing Injury
People with peripheral neuropathy may be more likely to suffer injury and infection in the hands and feet. Numbness and pressure can lead to cuts and bruises going unnoticed and untreated. To help prevent injury:
- Avoid very hot and very cold exposure.
- Be extra careful when using sharp objects such as knives or scissors.
- Wear slippers or shoes at all times.
- Inspect your hands and feet for cuts, scrapes, and bruises daily.
- Drink plenty of water during cancer treatments.
- Report symptoms to your doctor or nurse right away.

Treatment
Your doctor may:
- Decrease the amount of medication prescribed.
- Hold a dose of the medication.
- Stop using the medication.

There is medication that treats the pain, numbness, and tingling caused by peripheral neuropathies. Talk with doctor or nurse about your questions and concerns.