

Peripheral Neuropathy of the Foot

Information for patients



Podiatry Department

What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet is about a neurological condition called Peripheral Neuropathy and how it can affect your feet.

What is Peripheral Neuropathy?

Peripheral Neuropathy is nerve damage which affects the extremities (feet, legs, hands and arms).

What causes Peripheral Neuropathy?

The nerves can become damaged for a number of different reasons, including:

- Injury or trauma
- Viral infection (e.g. shingles)
- Alcohol excess
- Vitamin deficiency
- A side effect of certain medications
- Some medical conditions (e.g. diabetes).

Sometimes there is no known cause. This is called idiopathic neuropathy.

Signs and symptoms

The symptoms depend on which nerves are affected. Patients most commonly experience loss of sensation (numbness). Other symptoms can include:

- Tingling in the hands and feet
- Burning, stabbing or shooting pains
- Loss of balance and co-ordination
- Muscle weakness.

Diagnosis

A simple non-invasive test will determine if you have lost sensation in your feet. Blood tests can help identify some of the causes of peripheral neuropathy. In cases where the cause cannot be easily identified, your doctor may refer you to neurology for further tests.

Treatments available

Treatment is usually aimed at managing the cause of the neuropathy (e.g. medication for diabetes or modifying your alcohol intake). Not every cause is treatable. Patients with painful symptoms may be given medication to help relieve them. You will be referred to a Podiatrist for further assessment, treatment and advice to reduce your risk of complications.

What could happen to my feet?

You are unlikely to feel when you have a wound or blister on your foot. These can develop into ulcers which may become infected and be difficult to heal because of the Peripheral Neuropathy. You are also at risk of developing Charcot Foot (fractures and deformity of the foot). In severe cases these conditions can lead to amputation.

What can I do to help myself?

Check your feet every day for blisters, breaks in the skin, pain or signs of infection such as swelling, heat or redness. Contact your podiatrist straight away if you have any of these.

- Avoid soaking your feet as this can damage the skin. Dry your feet carefully, especially between the toes.
- Do not cut your toenails unless your podiatrist advises you to do so.
- Do not remove hard skin or corns. Instead tell your podiatrist if you have these.

- If your skin is dry, apply a moisturising cream, avoiding the areas between your toes.
- Avoid walking barefoot. Footwear should protect your feet, but not be so tight that they rub your skin. Before putting your shoes on, check them for objects which shouldn't be there (e.g. nails which have punctured the sole or stones inside your shoe). You may not feel these with your feet.
- You may not recognise high or low temperatures, so you should never put your feet near a fire to heat them up. Remove hot water bottles or pads before getting into bed. Do not use your feet to check the temperature of a bath or shower.

Follow-up care

Your podiatrist will assess your feet and create a treatment plan for you. Sometimes this will include routine appointments to treat complex nails, hard skin or corns. It may include orthotic insoles to wear inside your shoes to prevent hard skin and corns. You will be given advice about caring for your feet and your footwear to help you avoid foot ulcers. Podiatrists also provide specialist treatment for foot ulcers and infections.

We encourage you to discuss any questions or concerns that you may have with your Podiatrist.

Please keep these contact details for your Podiatry Clinic safe.

Telephone Number: