

Peripheral Neuropathy (Foot Sensation) and Balance

What is Peripheral Neuropathy?

Peripheral neuropathy is a condition where the nerve endings located in the feet and hand becomes damaged, leading to altered sensation and numbness in the feet and hands.

What causes Peripheral Neuropathy?

Peripheral Neuropathy may be caused by various conditions. It is common in people with:

- Diabetes
- Advanced age
- Nerve damage and trauma
- Alcohol and drug misuse
- Vitamin deficiencies
- Chemotherapy and Radiotherapy
- Chronic arthritis and certain type of cancer of the bones
- Chronic peripheral oedema
- Some neurological and hereditary conditions
- Autoimmune, liver and kidney diseases
- Infections such as HIV, shingles
- Exposure to toxic industrial chemicals

How does Peripheral Neuropathy affect balance?

People with peripheral neuropathy may have problems with their balance and be at a greater risk of falling. Many people with peripheral neuropathy will have difficulties with the feeling in their feet; this in turn leads to difficulties feeling surfaces under their feet. They may also feel like their feet are sticking to the ground, slowness and unsteadiness when walking.

Problems can include:

- Walking when it is dark or visibility is poor
- Tripping on uneven surfaces such as grass, pebbles and on the pavement
- Walking and talking at the same time, or window shopping
- Walking up or downhill
- Difficulty in maintaining balance immediately after standing quickly
- Difficulty to carry a cup of tea or hot plate of food when walking
- Difficulty to manage more than one activity at the same time when standing or walking
- Standing with their eyes closed when washing their face or taking a shower
- Standing in a moving bus

- Turning around or rushing quickly to open a door or to answer a phone call
- Bending over to pick an object up from the floor

What can be done to reduce the risk of falls?

- Ensuring that places they walk are well lit, e.g. good lighting around the house at night
- Wear sturdy, footwear with hard soles and good grip
- Avoid slip on shoes or sandals
- Use mobility aids and supporting aids as required
- Avoid walking and talking at the same time
- Concentrate on one activity at a time
- Take adequate time to complete tasks and avoid rushing activities
- Install grab rails and non-slip mats in the bathroom
- Removing any potential trip hazards around the house, such as loose rugs, uneven flooring, electrical cords and clutter on the floor
- Organising their house so that excessive turning, stretching and bending is kept to a minimum
- If they use public transport, try to make sure they get a seat and avoid standing on a moving bus

Does Peripheral Neuropathy affect driving?

- By law they must tell **DVLA** if they have peripheral neuropathy
- People with sensation loss in the feet may have difficulty with driving; in particular they may find it difficult to gauge the pressure that they place on the foot pedals. In cases like this, they should not drive unless their car is adapted.
- If they are concerned about losing sensation of their foot and are a driver, they should contact the G.P. in the first instance
- **Driving Mobility** may be able to assist them with a driving assessment and recommendations based upon their needs. (www.drivingmobility.org.uk)

Useful links:

NHS UK: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/peripheral-neuropathy/>

DVLA: Peripheral neuropathy and driving, <https://www.gov.uk/peripheral-neuropathy-and-driving>

North East Drive Mobility: <https://www.cntw.nhs.uk/services/north-east-drive-mobility-independent-assessment-advice-service-walkergate-park/>

Diabetes UK: https://www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/complications/nerves_neuropathy

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In order to assist us to improve the services available, your information may be used for clinical audit, research, teaching and anonymised for National NHS Reviews and Statistics.

Further information is available via Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust website (<https://www.qegateshead.nhs.uk/fairprocessing>) or by contacting the Data Protection Officer by telephone on 0191 445 8418 or by email ghnt.ig.team@nhs.net.

This leaflet can be made available in other languages and formats upon request

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