

Nerve and Muscle Effects

Your nervous system affects just about all your body's organs and tissues. So it's not surprising that when chemotherapy affects the cells of the nervous system--as the drugs sometimes do--a wide range of side effects can result. For example, certain drugs can cause peripheral neuropathy, a condition that may make you feel a tingling, burning, weakness, or numbness in the hands and/or feet. Other nerve-related symptoms include loss of balance, clumsiness, difficulty picking up objects and buttoning clothing, walking problems, jaw pain, hearing loss, stomach pain, and constipation. In addition to affecting the nerves, certain anticancer drugs also can affect the muscles and make them weak, tired, or sore.

In some cases, nerve and muscle effects--though annoying--may not be serious. In other cases, nerve and muscle symptoms may indicate serious problems that need medical attention. Be sure to report any suspected nerve or muscle symptoms to your doctor. Most of the time, these symptoms will get better; however, it may take up to a year after your treatment ends.

Caution and common sense can help you deal with nerve and muscle problems. For example, if your fingers become numb, be very careful when grasping objects that are sharp, hot, or otherwise dangerous. If your sense of balance or muscle strength is affected, avoid falls by moving carefully, using handrails when going up or down stairs and using bathmats in the bathtub or shower. Do not wear slippery shoes.

Some nerve and muscle-related symptoms include:

- tingling
- burning
- weakness or numbness in the hands and/or feet
- pain when walking
- weak, sore, tired or achy muscles
- loss of balance
- clumsiness
- difficulty picking up objects and buttoning clothing
- shaking or trembling
- walking problems
- jaw pain
- hearing loss
- stomach pain
- constipation

How can I cope with nerve and muscle problems?

If your fingers are numb, be very careful when grasping objects that are sharp, hot, or otherwise dangerous.

If your sense of balance or muscle strength is affected, avoid falls by moving carefully, using handrails when going up or down stairs, and using bath mats in the bathtub or shower.

Always wear shoes with rubber soles (if possible).

Ask your doctor for pain medicine.