

# Peripheral Neuropathy in the feet

## Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please contact the PALS desk on 01271 314090 or at [rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net](mailto:rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net).

## What is neuropathy?

Neuropathy is the loss of feeling in your feet. The nerves become damaged and prevent signals being sent between the central nervous system and the peripheral nervous system.

## What causes neuropathy?

There are many different reasons why your feet may become neuropathic. The most common are listed below:

- Diabetes – high blood sugar levels can lead to nerve damage
- Alcoholic neuropathy – drinking too much alcohol can cause nerve damage
- Hereditary diseases – e.g. Charcot-Marie-Tooth, Friedreich's ataxia
- Chronic kidney disease – if your kidneys do not function correctly, this can lead to an imbalance in chemicals in the bloodstream, which can cause peripheral neuropathy
- Chemotherapy – some cancer treatments can cause peripheral neuropathy
- Infections – some infections, such as viral infections, can damage the nerves
- Vitamin B12 deficiency – can cause damage to the nerves
- Injury or trauma – direct trauma to the nerves or damage to the spine can cause peripheral neuropathy
- Autoimmune diseases – e.g. rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, Sjögrens syndrome and Guillain-Barré syndrome can all cause peripheral neuropathy in some cases
- For some people there is no specific cause for the nerve damage. This is called idiopathic peripheral neuropathy

## What are the symptoms?

The symptoms can vary depending on which nerves are affected. Peripheral neuropathy usually affects the feet but can also affect the hands and legs. Symptoms include:

- tingling and numbness
- burning or shooting pains
- loss of feeling in feet – you may not feel it if you stand on a sharp object or burn your feet
- muscle weakness
- foot deformity
- callus on the feet from the pressure caused by ill-fitting shoes. You may not be aware that the shoes are rubbing.

## How could neuropathy affect me?

- You may develop burns or scalds
- Infection risk – you may develop a wound on your feet and not be aware of it. This increases your chance of an infection.
- Falls risk – you may have loss of feeling in your feet, meaning you are not aware of your feet when you walk, leading to a loss of balance

## Why is this important for my feet?

If the nerves in your feet do not work correctly, you may not be aware of damage to your feet. If you are unaware of problems developing, you may develop a wound. It is important to monitor your feet daily.

## How do I look after my feet with peripheral neuropathy?

- It is important to check your feet every day for any open areas, swelling, changes in colour, or discharge. If you are unable to reach your feet, place a mirror on the floor to check your feet, or ask a relative or carer.
- Never walk barefoot as this leaves your feet unprotected
- Check the insides and soles of shoes and slippers for anything that may damage the feet
- Check the temperature of a bath or shower with your elbow first to prevent scalding the feet
- Never use a hot water bottle or electric blanket directly on the feet
- Turn socks inside out to prevent seams from rubbing
- Moisturise your feet daily

## Driving

If you have a condition which may affect your driving, please visit the DVLA website or contact them directly.

Drivers' Medical Enquiries  
DVLA  
Swansea  
SA99 1TU

Tel: 0300 790 6806

Website: [www.gov.uk/peripheral-neuropathy-and-driving](http://www.gov.uk/peripheral-neuropathy-and-driving)

## What do I do if I have a problem with my feet?

If you have a wound on your foot, cover it with a dry sterile dressing and contact the podiatry department on 01271 341509 or visit your GP.

## Help available

If your neuropathy is very painful, it may be possible for your GP to prescribe medication. Your GP will be able to discuss your individual case and suitability for treatment.

## Further information

### North Devon Podiatry Services

Email: [ndht.podiatry@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.podiatry@nhs.net)

Tel: 01271 341509

Address: North Devon Podiatry Services, Barnstaple Health Centre, Vicarage Street, Barnstaple, North Devon, EX32 7BH

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## PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email [rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net](mailto:rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

## Have your say

Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

Tell us about your experience of our services. Share your feedback on the Care Opinion website [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk).

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