Neuropathy

WHAT IS IT?

Neuropathy is nerve damage that can come from chemotherapy treatments. It commonly causes pain in the hands and feet but can be found in other areas of the body as well and can get worse over time. Symptoms include general pain, tingling, burning, or sharpness in different areas of the body, as well as weakness, trouble walking or balancing, and picking things up with the hands. Other symptoms can include changes in vision and hearing and gastrointestinal problems.

HOW COMMON IS IT?

According to livestrong.org, about 1-2% of Americans are affected by it. However, when looking directly at cancer populations treated with chemotherapy, the percentage of people experiencing neuropathy or neuropathy-type symptoms goes up to 30-40% according to an article by the National Cancer Institute.

Certain pre-existing conditions can increase your risk, such as diabetes, thyroid dysfunction, infections, or autoimmune diseases.

TIPS FOR MANAGING IT:

- Try low-impact exercises such as swimming or biking
- Stretching/yoga
- Relaxation techniques such as meditation
- Given that neuropathy can increase your risk of injury, remove possible tripping hazards and keep your home well lit
- Be cautious when moving and try to steady yourself when possible
- Consider using a cane or walker if you struggle with walking or balancing
- Consult with your doctor about pain management and the possibility of seeing a pain specialist or physical therapist

Here are links to more information and tips regarding neuropathy:

http://www.breastcancer.org/treatment/side_effects/neuropathy
http://www.cancercare.org/tagged/neuropathy