Soothe Your Nerves

Simple remedies for neuropathy

April 1, 1997 By Enid Vazquez

You may feel tingly when falling in love, but the pins and needles of peripheral neuropathy aren't at all sweet. Sensations of shooting pains, numbness, burning and ants crawling all over the feet, legs, hands and arms may indicate damaged nerves -- a serious but sometimes reversible effect of HIV itself, vitamin deficiencies or certain AIDS drugs, especially the "3Ds": d4T, ddI and ddC. Luckily, several simple remedies are available.

When drugs are the cause, it's necessary to stop them very quickly; otherwise, the damage and pain may be permanent. Check with your physician immediately upon feeling symptoms.

David Moore, MD, an acupuncturist with Chicago's Triad Health Practice, says none of the drugs -- tricyclic antidepressants, anticonvulsants and antiarrhythmics -- used to treat neuropathic pain is terribly effective, though some PWAs get limited relief. He does recommend an opiate painkiller, such as Vicodin, especially at night.

Many PWAs have found acupuncture, which works by releasing the body's own pain-relief chemicals, helpful. Moore reports that although the benefits vary, patients experience relief lasting from a few days up to two weeks and even longer after repeated treatments. (A federal clinical trial will be completed later this year.) Moore also finds that electroacupuncture -- weak voltage sent through needles -- can be even more effective.

Chicago acupuncturist Yosef Pollack says his clients have greatly reduced their neuropathy with the herb ginkgo, thought to improve circulation to the nerves. He also suggests periodically shaking out and rotating your hands and feet, and using a rolling foot massager (prices run $7 to $15).

You may be able to at least partially reverse the nerve damage and get significant symptom relief with nutrients such as B vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and fatty acids, which the body can use to repair nerves and restore their function. HIV-nutrition educator Lark Lands, PhD, says B vitamins are the cornerstone; she recommends combining a high-potency B-complex, biotin, choline (preferably phosphatidylcholine), inositol (preferably myoinositol), B-6 and B-12, preferably via injection. Other important nutrients Lands cites are high-potency borage oil, alpha-lipoic (thioctic) acid and magnesium (best taken separately from calcium, since the two compete for absorption).

Lands has heard many success stories from PWAs using these nutrients. She urges sticking with this program for several months, rather than expecting quick results, and emphasizes the need to also incorporate all the other nutrients necessary for good health.

San Francisco physician Jon Kaiser, author of Immune Power: A Comprehensive Treatment Program for HIV (St. Martin’s Press/New York City), recommends trying a more modest nutrient approach before even starting drugs likely to cause neuropathy. Specifically, he suggests magnesium, calcium and B-6. He says these nutrients “have enabled the vast majority of my patients to avoid peripheral neuropathy.” Lands notes that any individual B vitamins should always be accompanied by a B-complex to avoid throwing any nutrients out of balance.

After all, it’s best to soothe those prickling sensations and save your tingling for love.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/soothe-nerves