

15 Ways to Prevent Falls and Protect Your Feet

Peripheral neuropathy can cause balance issues and put patients at a greater risk for falls and other injuries. Here are 15 tips to prevent falls and protect your feet with peripheral neuropathy.

Part of the problem with peripheral neuropathy comes from something that can be described as **cascading symptoms**. This is a term used to refer to the fact that your nerves are involved with a *lot* of the things your body does. So when they start to break down, there are also a *lot* of other things that can wind up going wrong next, as a result. Think of it as a chain reaction of symptoms, if you will.

This cascading symptoms idea means that peripheral neuropathy often causes **secondary symptoms**, and these can be extra difficult to deal with (and sometimes even life-threatening).

Increased vulnerability to falls and the injuries they can cause is one of the most common secondary symptoms of peripheral neuropathy. It's also one of the ones that cause people the most grief in their day-to-day lives. Not only can peripheral neuropathy be frustrating, but if it leads to further injury it can even be more painful and dangerous. If this weren't enough, your nerves are instrumental in the body's healing process, too – so peripheral neuropathy not only puts you at a heightened risk for injury, but it makes your body have a harder time from healing, if and when injuries do happen. These factors make it *extra* important that injury is avoided when dealing with peripheral neuropathy.

A Bit of Imbalance Throws Everything Off

Your nervous system includes three distinct types of nerves: your sensory nerves, your motor nerves, and your autonomic nerves. When the [sensory nerves](#) in your feet start to become damaged by peripheral neuropathy, they typically experience one of two different things: either *positive feedback* or *negative feedback*. While positive feedback refers to an overactive nerve sending messages to your brain that shouldn't be sent, **negative feedback** means that no message is being sent to your brain at all.

In other words, negative feedback is a *loss of feeling*.

Sometimes peripheral neuropathy causes [painful burning in the feet](#) (positive feedback), and sometimes it causes numbness (negative feedback). And while it might seem like negative feedback is a blessing from above when compared to the nightmare of fiery feet caused by positive feedback symptoms...the opposite is actually true.

An absence of feeling in your feet and toes can wind up being a very dangerous thing.

Loss of feeling in *one single toe* is enough to cause tangible balance issues, or even just throw off your gait a bit. Both can have consequences if left unaddressed over time. Maybe your altered gait begins to cause joint alignment and back issues. Maybe your slight loss of balance leads to a fall that potentially has serious consequences.

In addition to dangerous falls, peripheral neuropathy can also put you at risk for injuries that you might not notice right away, due to numbness in the feet. Injuries that go left untreated can cause infection and lead to even more serious complications...up to and including amputation.

As you can see, peripheral neuropathy can lead to problems in the feet and lower legs that can ultimately cause some seriously dangerous situations, so it's good to know how to protect yourself when nerve damage becomes a problem.

As it turns out, there are a ton of ways to make your home and living spaces safer for the nerve-ending-impaired. And they're not all that hard or expensive, either. Of course, the necessity for change is individual and up to you, and will depend on your specific case of peripheral neuropathy.

Just remember: It never hurts to be proactive. The more you take care to create a neuropathy-safe environment, the less likely you are to deal with further complications down the line.

1. Conduct a Medication Review for Side-Effects

If you're taking any medications, it might be a good idea to chat with your doctor about how they might be impairing your sense of balance. Some medications, in addition to actually advancing the nerve damage that characterizes peripheral neuropathy, can impact your inner ear and have an effect on your sense of balance.

If you're dealing with peripheral neuropathy that's causing sensation loss in your feet or lower legs, it might be a good idea to check up and make sure you're not taking any medications that will further impair your balance, and if you are, discuss possible alternatives with your doctor if balance has become an issue.

2. Keep a “Fall Log,” and Record Your Symptoms

It helps to have a record of the times you might be displaying problems that could be related to nerve damage, especially if you're still not sure as to whether or not you might actually be dealing with peripheral neuropathy. Keep a journal in which you record issues that you have with balance. Whether this means an odd stumble that you don't think should have happened, or a full-blown fall, it's going to help to have a record of your symptoms.

Discussing this with a doctor *might* help them figure out if peripheral neuropathy is indeed afoot. If this has been established to be the problem already, keeping a log of your symptoms and falls can also help you keep track of your nerve damage progression.

3. Practice Safe Exercises

It's been proven to show that exercising is a great way to help cope with the effects of peripheral neuropathy. In a variety of different ways, at that. For one thing, movement has been shown to be beneficial to the nerves, and regular exercise is one of the ways to actively regrow those damaged endings once neuropathy has begun to set in.

On top of this, regular exercise and movement can help you to maintain, and even strengthen your sense of balance. Try to focus on exercises that are nice and gentle on your body – you don't want to go doing anything too high-impact, of course. But something that encourages a focus on muscle movement can, [according to the Mayo Clinic](#), help you to reduce the risk of falls by “improving strength, balance, coordination, and flexibility.”

4. Switch to Sturdy Shoes



When dealing with peripheral neuropathy, fashion often winds up getting pushed out of the picture just a bit. One of the best ways to decrease your chances of falling is by making sure to wear more sensible shoes that will offer you added balance and extra protection.

Crocs are a great solution for those dealing with peripheral neuropathy – not only are they nice and wide, but they're spacious and comfortable, to boot. Width is your friend when it comes to giving yourself a bit of a balance boost. Not only this, but wider, rubbery shoes like Crocs also give you better grip and help you avoid slipping or losing traction.

5. Add Handrails to Your Home

Grab bars and handrails go a long way when it comes to adding a bit more stability to your around-the-house activities. This

is doubly true in what one might consider high-risk areas, like the bathroom. All that water and tile can make for a bad combination, especially if your balance is compromised.

These items don't have to be permanent and can help you with things like walking up the stairs or getting in and out of the shower, as these activities might be extra risky when peripheral neuropathy is causing problems in your feet and lower legs.

6. Light Your Living Space Extra Well

Great lighting is your best friend when peripheral neuropathy has started to impact your sense of balance. It really can't be understated – a bit more visibility goes a *long* way when it comes to avoiding things like trips and falls. What might not have been considered dangerous territory can become a lot more treacherous when peripheral neuropathy has been fooling with your feet.

It can help to isolate potentially troublesome parts of your home, office, or any other spaces in which you spend a lot of time. An extra lamp or two can help you avoid dangerous falls that might lead to further injury.

7. Assist Your Walking



A variety of different tools can help you out with your balance as you walk around from day-to-day, from canes to walking sticks and beyond. While they might not make you feel like the hippest person on the block, they'll go a long way towards preventing further injury – because nobody looks hip in a hospital bed, right?

This tip greatly depends on the severity of your peripheral neuropathy, obviously. If you think a simple walking stick might help you out from time to time, go for it. Choose the tool that works best for you and your condition, as there are many options (and variations) available.

8. Use Non-Slip Mats in Wet Areas

Bathrooms and parts of the homes where sinks are present can be especially risky when it comes to slip-and-falls for those of us dealing with peripheral neuropathy. Depending on what

area of the house you're addressing, there are different types of mats that can provide you with more grip and traction, and remove the risk of falling.

Bath mats made with suction cups on the bottom are wonderfully helpful for eliminating the risk for slips in the shower, and more heavy-duty rubber mats are great for places like the kitchen or washroom.

9. Pad Your Corners

Neuropathy-proofing your living space isn't dissimilar from baby-proofing: You want to eliminate tripping hazards, sharp corners, and other things that might be potentially harmful – and dangerous with your compromised healing system. This can be done with simple removable furniture foam, available at any big box retailer.

10. Put Reflective Strips on Steps

For highly progressed neuropathy, it's smart to eliminate steps altogether as will be talked about shortly, but this isn't necessarily always an option. If you have to deal with steps on a regular basis, it might help to put colored or reflective strips of tape on them. Anything that helps make sure you notice steps to avoid tripping, will be beneficial in the long run.

11. Keep Your Floor Clean

Believe it or not, peripheral neuropathy can make floor clutter go from unsightly to *dangerous*. Junk on the floor is easily tripped on, especially if your gait or balance has been

impacted by peripheral neuropathy.

It's smart to be ever-vigilant about keeping your floor space clean and tidy, so as to ensure that you're reducing your risk for trips and falls.

12. Rugs Can Be Your Friend or Foe

If you've got more of a hard surface home, rugs can be your friend to help cushion your step when peripheral neuropathy has taken its toll on the feet and lower legs, and provide better traction than their harder, smoother counterparts. However, rugs can also be a tripping hazard when transitioning from a hard surface to a rug. Edges need to be very secure without a significant lip to stumble you up.

13. Avoid Loose, Flowy Clothing

Again, this might conflict with your fashion sensibilities, but for the sake of avoiding serious injury...it's probably worth it. Peripheral neuropathy can compromise your movements in ways that are made more dangerous by loose-fitting clothes. It becomes that much easier to fall, which is why it's best to stick with clothes that are comfortable and relaxed but still fit well enough to not present a risk for tripping.

14. Eliminate Stairs, If

Possible

While this might be a tall order for some, it's smartest to [limit your living to a single level](#) when peripheral neuropathy is making things difficult on a day-to-day basis. Simply eliminating stairs from your life will go a long way not just towards making your days less painful, but also will reduce the risk for further injury.

15. Just Be. More. Careful!

When it comes down to it, knowing that you're dealing with peripheral neuropathy means that you have to be a lot more careful, in a general sense. You must be more intentional and more measured in your movements. Your body's warning system has been compromised, so you might not even realize that a problem has happened until it's too late.

It's important to keep all of this in mind in the case of progressing balance challenges. Being informed is an excellent step in the right direction in protecting yourself from a serious fall and avoiding further complications.

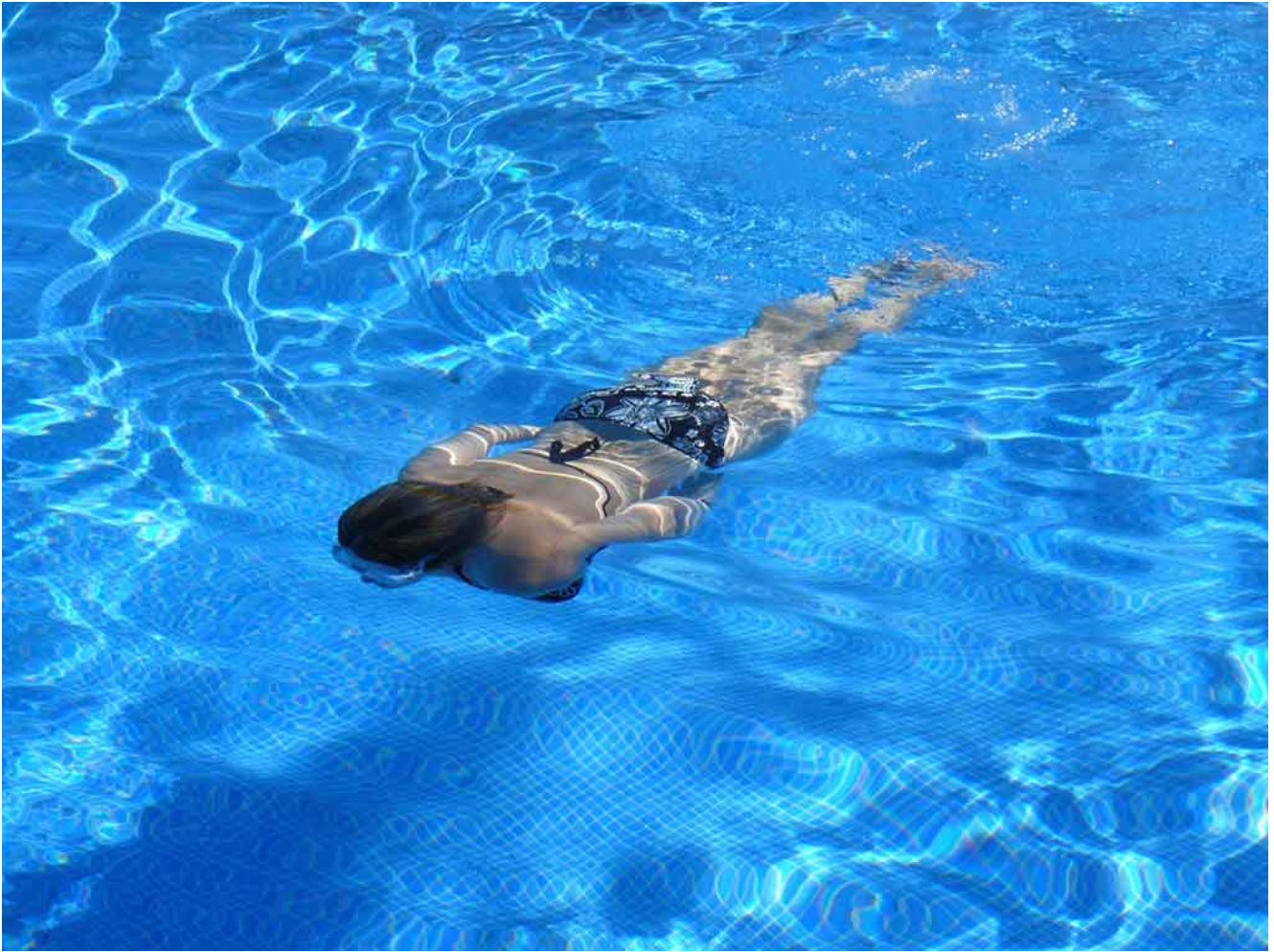
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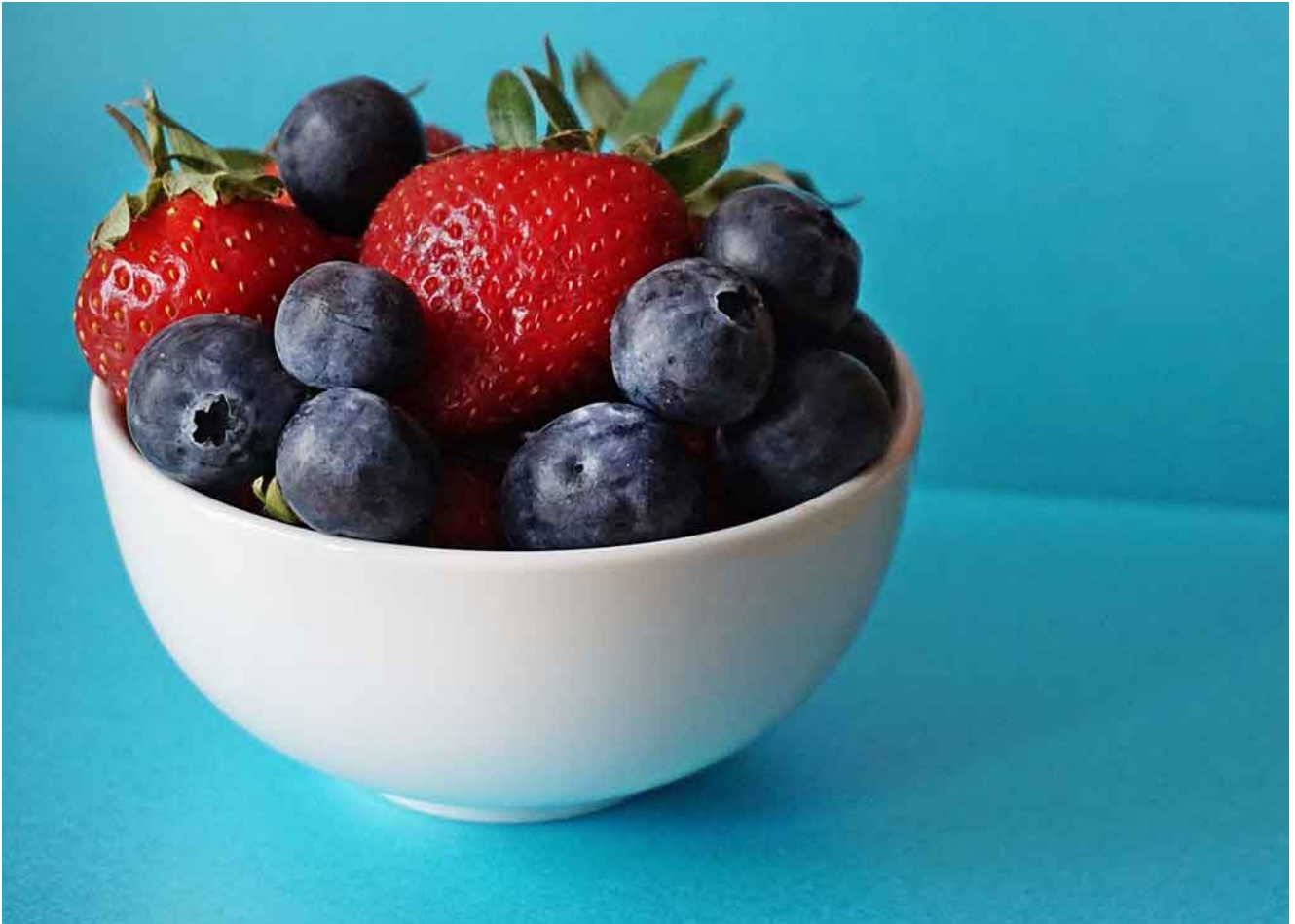
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